Database Applications – Microsoft Access

Lesson 6A
Designing Custom Forms

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Forms

Forms are used to view and manage data in a user-friendly layout.

- A custom form is a form developed completely from scratch applying the controls, layout, and formatting specified by the designer.
- A customized form is a form that uses a form developed with the Form Wizard or AutoForm to which the designer makes changes in the layout and formatting.

User Interface

When properly designed, forms provide an attractive, easy-to-use interface for users to enter data. Properly designed forms include effective layouts (often matching paper forms), descriptive labels, and even instructions for entering data.

Important Terminology

- Form: an Access object used to view and maintain data stored in underlying tables
- Control: any item found on a form
- Compound Control: a bound control in which the field and its label are connected and work as one object
- Properties: field characteristics
- User Interface: the way in which an application interacts with the user
- Undo: a Windows feature allowing the user to reverse certain application actions
- Text Box: a control used to store interactive data
- Label: a control used to enter descriptive information
- Combo Box: a control that allows the user to choose a value from a list or type an entry

Text Boxes Vs. Labels

It is imperative that you understand the difference between text boxes and labels.

- Text Boxes are used to store dynamic data. Text boxes can be bound or unbound.
- A bound text box is connected to a field in an underlying table. In form view, bound text boxes display the data entered in fields stored in the underlying table. As the data in the underlying table changes, the data displayed in the form changes.
- Unbound text boxes are used to enter expressions. In form view, unbound text boxes display the results of the expressions stored in them. As the data used in the expression changes, the data in the text box changes.
- Labels are used to display descriptive information. The data stored in label boxes is static and does not change.
Text Boxes Vs. Labels

Use the following tools found on the Design tab to add text box and/or label controls to your form.

Text Box Control  Label Control

You can distinguish between text boxes and labels in Form Design view by their look. Labels are transparent (you can see the grid dots behind them). Text boxes are opaque (you cannot see through them).

You can further distinguish between text boxes and labels in Form Design view by displaying the Property Sheet. The type of control you have selected will be indicated at the top of the Property Sheet.

Creating a Custom Form

Follow the steps below to create the basis for a custom form.

- Click the Form Design button from the Create tab.
- On the Design tab, click the Add Existing Fields button.
- If necessary, click the Show All Tables link
- Click the plus sign beside the table you want to use to display the available fields.

Creating a Custom Form

When creating a custom form in Design View, you work from a blank Design Grid. Underlying Table, Bound Controls and Controls are used to create the form.

Adding Fields

You are now ready to begin designing your custom form.

- The first step in designing your form is to add the bound controls (fields).
- Click a field to select it, then drag the selected field to the desired position on the form.
- You can double-click fields to add them to the design grid and each double-clicked field will be added in a columnar layout.
- Multiple fields can be added as a group. Select multiple fields by clicking the first field in the group, then while holding down the Shift key, select the last field in the group. Click on anywhere within the selection to drag the field group to the form.

Guidelines for Adding Fields

- Many times database forms are based on existing hard copy forms. If this is the case, place fields on the database form in the order and alignment in which they appear on the paper form.
- If no existing form is available, lay the fields out in a logical and pleasing arrangement.

Adding Fields

HINT: When you drag a field onto a form, your mouse pointer appears in the shape of a rectangle meant to look like a field. The rectangle represents the text box portion of the compound control. When placing field controls on your form, place them about a half inch to the right of the position in which you want them to appear. This leaves room for the label which will appear to the left of the text box.
Field Layout Modifications

Once a field has been placed on a form, the field layout can be modified in the following ways:

- Delete the entire field control by clicking the compound control text box and pressing the Delete key on the keyboard.
- Delete the field label by clicking the compound control label box and pressing the Delete key on the keyboard.
- Move the compound control by clicking anywhere on the control and using the cross pointer to move the text box and associated label.
- Arrange the layout and spacing of the text box and its label by moving each element separately. Place the cross pointer on the move box in the upper left corner of the control then drag the control to its new location.

Formatting the Form

- A functional form can be created by simply adding fields to a blank form design grid.
- Create forms with appeal and appropriate user interface by formatting the form and adding custom labels.

Formatting the Form

Formatting Includes:

- Adding background colors
- Adding text color
- Changing font size and style
- Adding graphics and lines
- Adding text attributes such as bold, italic, or underline
- Adding special effects

Formatting the Form

Formatting can be applied through the Properties dialog box or from the Format Tab.

Format Tab

Considering User Interface

When designing forms, consider the ways in which the user will interact with the form. Review the following guidelines:

- Make sure fields are arranged in a logical order.
- Whenever possible, try to fit all form objects in one viewing screen.
- Use formatting to make important areas of the form stand out.
- Add labels that identify the information on and purpose of the form as well as provide instructions to the user.
Combo Boxes

**Combo boxes** allow you to create drop-down option lists.

Combo boxes assist with user interface because they allow the user to make a selection from a list rather than typing in the data.

Combo boxes assist with internal control because an option can be set to accept only an item from the defined list.

Adding Combo Boxes To Tables and Forms

Combo boxes can be added to a table design or to form design.

When a combo box is created as part of a table, a Lookup field property is used to create the combo box list. Combo boxes added to tables automatically become part of a form if the field containing the combo box is added to the form.

Click here for a mini-tutorial on How to Add a Combo Box to a Table.

When a combo box is created within a form, you use the Combo Box tool to create the drop-down list. Tutorial 6 in your textbook will show you how to add a Combo Box list to a form.

Making Adjustments

Form design is a trial-and-error process. In order to evaluate the design of a form, the designer must switch frequently between Design and Form View.

Most design changes can be reversed using *Undo*, including formatting applications and field modifications.

**Suggestion**: If you plan to make major design changes, be sure to save the form first. Then, if you don’t like your changes, you can always revert back to your original design.

To Customize or Not?

- Form design is a personal and subjective task. However, you should follow the form design guidelines outlined in this lesson.
- When deciding whether you need to develop a complete custom form from scratch, customize a form based on an AutoForm or Wizard, or use a "quick and dirty" AutoForm depends on your needs and other constraints.
- One reasonable guideline to follow is that if the form will require extensive customization, it is probably most efficient to design the form from scratch rather than use an AutoForm or Wizard.

End of Lesson

- Complete and submit the assigned tutorial and exercises for this lesson.