The System Catalog

Every database system must have a meta-database of information on the schemata which it contains. This includes, for each schema, at least the following:

- The names of the relations in the schema.
- The names of the columns of each relation.
- The data type of each column.
- The integrity constraints on the relations.
- Information about indices on the relations.
- The *access privileges* for the elements of the schema.

This database is often called the *system catalog.*

In a relational database system, the catalog itself often consists of relations.

- Figure 17.2 from the 3rd edition of the textbook illustrates a basic catalog relation for the Company database of the textbook.

- Figure 17.3 of that same edition shows some alternatives.

Note: Oracle calls the system catalog the *data dictionary.*

Access to the System Catalog

There are a number of distinct ways in which one may access the information contained in the system catalog. Not all systems support all of these modes.

Via SQL:

- The SQL standard requires that an SQL-environment contain an *Information Schema* with the unqualified name `INFORMATION_SCHEMA`. It does not seem that many SQL implementations follow this part of the standard very closely, so one should not depend upon it.

- Some vendors provide a proprietary extension to their SQL which provides access to the system catalog.
  - Oracle SQL*Plus.
  - `pg_` relations of PostgreSQL.
  - This approach has the disadvantage that it is vendor specific; it is not portable across implementations of SQL.
  - This approach has the advantage that it allows vendor-specific features (*e.g.,* special data types, object-relational extensions) to be supported.

Via ODBC:

- The ODBC standard provides API calls which permit one to access much of the information in the system catalog.
  - Since compliance to the ODBC standard is much more common that compliance to the SQL standard, this mode may be depended upon.

Via special interfaces:

- Some systems provide access to the system catalog via an interactive interface.
  - Microsoft Access
  - The *Enterprise Manager* of Oracle.

Basic Features of the PostgreSQL System Catalog

- PostgreSQL has a large numer of relations which it calls *system catalogs*.
- The following is taken from the PostgreSQL 7.4 documentation.

Table 43-1. System Catalogs

Catalog Name	*Purpose*
pg_aggregate	aggregate functions
pg_am	index access methods
pg_amop	access method operators
pg_amproc	access method support procedures
pg_attrdef	column default values
pg_attribute	table columns ("attributes")
pg_cast	casts (data type conversions)
pg_class	tables, indexes, sequences ("relations")
pg_constraint	check constraints, unique constraints, primary key constraints, foreign key constraints
pg_conversion	encoding conversion information
pg_database	databases within this database cluster
pg_depend	dependencies between database

Catalog Name	Purpose
	objects
pg_description	descriptions or comments on database objects
pg_group	groups of database users
pg_index	additional index information
pg_inherits	table inheritance hierarchy
pg_language	languages for writing functions
pg_largeobject	large objects
pg_listener	asynchronous notification support
pg_namespace	schemas
pg_opclass	index access method operator classes
pg_operator	operators
pg_proc	functions and procedures
pg_rewrite	query rewrite rules
pg_shadow	database users
pg_statistic	planner statistics
pg_trigger	triggers
pg_type	data types

- These relations can be viewed in the usual way from the SQL interface.

```
test=> \d pg_database
    Table "pg_catalog.pg_database"
    Column      |   Type    | Modifiers
---------------+-----------+-----------
 datname        | name      | not null
 datdba         | integer   | not null
 encoding       | integer   | not null
 datistemplate  | boolean   | not null
 datallowconn   | boolean   | not null
 datlastsysoid  | oid       | not null
 datvacuumxid   | xid       | not null
 datfrozenxid   | xid       | not null
 datpath        | text      | not null
 datconfig      | text[]    |
 datacl         | aclitem[] |
Indexes:
    "pg_database_datname_index" unique,
btree (datname)
    "pg_database_oid_index" unique, btree
(oid)

test=>
```

Ordinary relations can also be examined in this way.

```
test=> \d
          List of relations
 Schema |   Name   | Type  | Owner
--------+----------+-------+--------
 public | airline  | table | hegner
 public | airport  | table | hegner
 public | flight   | table | hegner
 public | schedule | table | hegner
 public | ticket   | table | hegner
(5 rows)

test=>

test=> \d airline
           Table "public.airline"
 Column  |         Type          | Modifiers
---------+-----------------------+-----------
 name    | character varying(15) | not null
 website | character varying(25) | not null
Indexes:
    "pkey_airline" primary key, btree (name)
```

- To view the entire system catalog `pg_catalog`:

```
test-> \dS
                    List of relations(code)
   Schema    |            Name             |  Type   |  Owner
-------------+-----------------------------+---------+----------
 pg_catalog | pg_aggregate                | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_am                       | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_amop                     | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_amproc                   | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_attrdef                  | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_attribute                | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_cast                     | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_class                    | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_constraint               | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_conversion               | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_database                 | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_depend                   | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_description              | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_group                    | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_index                    | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_indexes                  | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_inherits                 | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_language                 | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_largeobject              | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_listener                 | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_locks                    | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_namespace                | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_opclass                  | table   | postgresid,
attname)
 pg_catalog | pg_operator                 | table   | postgresid,
attnum)
 pg_catalog | pg_proc                     | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_rewrite                  | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_rules                    | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_settings                 | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_shadow                   | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_stat_activity            | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_stat_all_indexes         | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_stat_all_tables          | view    |
postgresname".
 pg_catalog | pg_stat_database            | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_stat_sys_indexes         | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_stat_sys_tables          | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_stat_user_indexes        | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_stat_user_tables         | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_statio_all_indexes       | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_statio_all_sequences     | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_statio_all_tables        | view    | postgres
```

```
 pg_catalog | pg_statio_sys_indexes    | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_statio_sys_sequences  | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_statio_sys_tables     | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_statio_user_indexes   | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_statio_user_sequences | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_statio_user_tables    | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_statistic             | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_stats                 | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_tables                | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_trigger               | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_type                  | table   | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_user                  | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_views                 | view    | postgres
 pg_catalog | pg_xactlock              | special | postgres
(54 rows)
```

- These can be viewed in more detail using *qualfied names.*

```
test=> \d pg_catalog.pg_tables
    View "pg_catalog.pg_tables"
   Column    |  Type   | Modifiers
-------------+---------+-----------
 schemaname  | name    |
 tablename   | name    |
 tableowner  | name    |
 hasindexes  | boolean |
 hasrules    | boolean |
 hastriggers | boolean |
View definition:
 SELECT n.nspname AS schemaname, c.relname AS
tablename, pg_get_userbyid(c.relowner) AS tableowner,
c.relhasindex AS hasindexes, c.relhasrules AS
hasrules, c.reltriggers > 0 AS hastriggers
   FROM pg_class c
   LEFT JOIN pg_namespace n ON n.oid = c.relnamespace
  WHERE c.relkind = 'r'::"char";


test=> select * from pg_catalog.pg_tables where
tableowner='hegner';
 schemaname | tablename | tableowner | hasindexes |
hasrules | hastriggers
------------+-----------+------------+------------
+----------+-------------
 public     | airline   | hegner | t  | f        | t
 public     | airport   | hegner | t  | f        | t
 public     | flight    | hegner | t  | f        | t
 public     | ticket    | hegner | t  | f        | t
 public     | schedule  | hegner | t  | f        | t
(5 rows)
```

Basic Features of the Oracle SQL*Plus Approach

At the most basic level, Oracle provides the `DESCRIBE` command within its extension of SQL.

```
DESCRIBE Works_On
```

might return something like**:**

Name	Null?	Type
ESSN	No	Char(9)
PNO	No	Int
HOURS	No	Decimal(3,1)

- This feature can only be used to obtain the most basic information about the relations.

- It may also be used to obtain information about aspects of the schema which are specific to Oracle, such as information about methods and procedures.

Oracle Data Dictionary Views:

- Each view consists of a single relation.

- There are three classes of views:
  - USER – attributes of objects owned by the current user.
  - ALL – attributes of objects accessible by the current user.
  - DBA – attributes of all objects

- Notes:
  - DBA attributes are available only to those with administrator privileges.
  - That which is available under USER and ALL is user dependent.

The following are the tables in the USER views.

USER View Name
USER_TABLES
USER_TAB_COLUMNS
USER_CONSTRAINTS
USER_CONS_COLUMNS
USER_INDICES
USER_IND_COLUMNS
USER_SYNONYMS
USER_TRIGGERS
USER_TAB_PRIVS

There is a corresponding table in each of the views ALL and DBA:

ALL View Name	DBA View Name
ALL_TABLES	DBA_TABLES
ALL_TAB_COLUMNS	DBA_TAB_COLUMNS
ALL_CONSTRAINTS	DBA_CONSTRAINTS
ALL_CONS_COLUMNS	DBA_CONS_COLUMNS
ALL_INDICES	DBA_INDICES
ALL_IND_COLUMNS	DBA_IND_COLUMNS
ALL_SYNONYMS	DBA_SYNONYMS
ALL_TRIGGERS	DBA_TRIGGERS
ALL_TAB_PRIVS	DBA_TAB_PRIVS

- Some of these tables are huge. For example, the ALL_TABLES view table has 37 columns.

- The full Oracle system actually has a much larger set of *static data dictionary views*.

The key feature of these data dictionary views is that they may be queried, just as may ordinary relations.

Example:

```
SELECT Table_Name, Column_Name, Data_Type
FROM    ALL_TAB_COLUMNS
WHERE (Table_Name = 'Employee') OR
            (Table_Name = 'Department');
```

might yield:

Table_Name	Column_Name	Data_Type
Employee	Fname	Varchar(5)
Employee	Minit	Char
Employee	Lname	Varchar(15)
Employee	SSN	Char(9)
Employee	Bdate	Date
Employee	Address	Varchar(30)
Employee	Sex	Char
Employee	Salary	Decimal(10,2)
Employee	Superssn	Char(9)
Employee	DNO	Int
Department	Dname	Varchar(15)
Department	Dnumber	Int
Department	Mgrssn	Char(9)
Department	Mgrstartdate	Date

provided that the company database were accessible to the user issuing the query.

These tables also contain statistical information which can be extracted:

First, tell the system to update the statistics:

```
ANALYZE TABLE Employee
COMPUTE STATISTICS;
```

Now issue a query to retrieve them:

```
SELECT Table_Name, Num_Rows, Blocks
FROM    ALL_TABLES
```

Basic Features of the ODBC Approach

- The ODBC standard provides a collection of API functions for querying the system catalog.
- They are more limited in overall scope than the Oracle collection, because they are not specific to a particular DBMS.

The prinicpal ones are the following:

```
SQLTables()
SQLTablePrivileges()
SQLColumns()
SQLColumnPrivileges()
SQLSpecialColumns()
SQLStatistics()
SQLPrimaryKeys()
SQLForeignKeys()
SQLProcedures()
SQLProcedureColumns()
```

Use is relatively straightforward, but involves the detail which is typically associated with ODBC, and will not be elaborated in these slides.