

Microsoft Azure Data Fundamentals

Exam Ref DP-900

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Exam Ref DP-900 Microsoft Azure Data Fundamentals

Daniel A. Seara Francesco Milano

Exam Ref DP-900 Microsoft Azure Data Fundamentals

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Contents at a glance

| | Introduction | xiii |
|-----------|---|------|
| CHAPTER 1 | Describe core data concepts | 1 |
| CHAPTER 2 | Describe how to work with relational data on Azure | 47 |
| CHAPTER 3 | Describe how to work with non-relational data on Azure | 135 |
| CHAPTER 4 | Describe an analytics workload on Azure | 203 |
| | Index | 305 |

Contents

| | Introduction | xiii |
|-----------|--|------|
| | Organization of this book | xi |
| | Preparing for the exam | xi |
| | Microsoft certifications | xii |
| | Quick access to online references | xii |
| | Errata, updates & book support | xiii |
| | Stay in touch | xiii |
| Chapter 1 | Describe core data concepts | 1 |
| | Skill 1.1: Describe types of core data workloads | 1 |
| | Describe streaming data | 3 |
| | Describe batch data | 10 |
| | Describe the difference between batch and streaming data | 19 |
| | Describe the characteristics of relational data | 20 |
| | Skill 1.2: Describe data analytics core concepts | 22 |
| | Describe analytics techniques | 23 |
| | Describe the concepts of ETL, ELT, and data processing | 28 |
| | Describe data visualization and basic chart types | 36 |
| | Chapter summary | 43 |
| | Thought experiment | 44 |
| | Thought experiment answers | 44 |
| Chapter 2 | Describe how to work with relational data on Azure | 47 |
| | Skill 2.1: Describe relational data workloads | 47 |
| | Identify the right data offering for a relational workload | 48 |
| | Describe relational data structures | 53 |

| Skill 2 | .2: Describe relational Azure data services | 58 |
|---------|---|-----|
| | Describe and compare PaaS, IaaS, and SaaS delivery models | 60 |
| | Describe Azure SQL Database | 63 |
| | Describe Azure Synapse Analytics | 69 |
| | Describe SQL Server on Azure Virtual Machine | 74 |
| | Describe Azure Database for PostgreSQL, Azure Database for MariaDB, and Azure Database for MySQL | 79 |
| | Describe Azure SQL Managed Instance | 83 |
| Skill 2 | .3: Identify basic management tasks for relational data | 87 |
| | Describe provisioning and deploying relational data services | 87 |
| | Describe method for deployment including ARM templates and Azure Portal | 90 |
| | Identify data security components (e.g., firewall, authentication) | 107 |
| | Identify basic connectivity issues (e.g., accessing from on-premises, access with Azure VNets, access from internet, authentication, firewalls) | 112 |
| | Identify query tools (e.g., Azure Data Studio, SQL Server Management Studio, sqlcmd utility, etc.) | 114 |
| Skill 2 | .4: Describe query techniques for data using SQL language | 122 |
| | Compare DDL versus DML | 123 |
| | Query relational data in PostgreSQL, MySQL, and Azure SQL Database | 126 |
| Chapt | er summary | 131 |
| Thou | ght experiment | 132 |
| | | |

Chapter 3 Describe how to work with non-relational data on Azure

| Skill 3.1: Describe non-relational data workloads | . 135 |
|---|-------|
| Describe the characteristics of non-relational data | 136 |
| Describe the types of non-relational and NoSQL data | 137 |
| Choose the correct data store | 142 |
| Determine when to use non-relational data | 143 |

135

| | Skill 3.2: Describe non-relational data offerings on Azure | 143 |
|-----------|---|-----|
| | Identify Azure data services for non-relational workloads | 144 |
| | Describe Azure Cosmos DB API | 144 |
| | Describe Azure Storage | 155 |
| | Describe Azure Table storage | 158 |
| | Describe Azure Blob storage | 163 |
| | Describe Azure File storage | 170 |
| | Skill 3.3: Identify basic management tasks for non-relational data | 175 |
| | Describe provisioning and deployment of non-relational data services | 175 |
| | Describe method for deployment including the Azure portal, Azure Resource Manager templates, Azure PowerShell, and the Azure command-line interface (CLI) | 176 |
| | Identify data security components (e.g., firewall, authentication, encryption) | 182 |
| | ldentify basic connectivity issues (e.g., accessing from on-premises, access with Azure VNets, access from internet, authentication, firewalls) | 190 |
| | Identify management tools for non-relational data | 194 |
| | Chapter summary | 198 |
| | Thought experiment | 199 |
| | Thought experiment answers | 201 |
| Chapter 4 | Describe an analytics workload on Azure | 203 |
| | Skill 4.1: Describe analytics workloads | 203 |
| | Skill 4.2: Describe the components of a modern data warehouse | 207 |
| | Describe modern data warehousing architecture and workload | 207 |
| | Describe Azure data services for modern data warehousing such as Azure Data Lake, Azure Synapse Analytics, | |

Azure Databricks, and Azure HDInsight

208

| Skill 4.3: Describe data ingestion and processing on Azure | 232 |
|---|-----|
| Describe the components of Azure Data Factory (e.g., pipeline, activities, etc.) | 233 |
| Describe data processing options (e.g., Azure HDInsight, Azure Databricks, | |
| Azure Synapse Analytics, Azure Data Factory) | 254 |
| Describe common practices for data loading | 276 |
| Skill 4.4: Describe data visualization in Microsoft Power BI | 278 |
| Describe the workflow in Power BI | 279 |
| Describe the role of interactive reports | 279 |
| Describe the role of dashboards | 294 |
| Describe the role of paginated reporting | 297 |
| Chapter summary | 299 |
| Thought experiment | 302 |
| Thought experiment answers | 304 |
| | |

Index

305

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Daniel Seara

While I am used to preparing and delivering live sessions, courses, and short articles, this was my first time writing a technical book. It is a very intensive and unique experience and, at the same time, the perfect occasion to rearrange and extend my knowledge about the topics covered. But also, it is something I could not have achieved alone.

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Introduction

In this connected era, it is important to determine how and when your data can be stored in the cloud. This book, both a reference and a tutorial, covers the different approaches to storing information in the Microsoft Azure environment. The book discusses and compares various storage options, helping you make better choices based on each particular need, and guides you through the steps to prepare, deploy, and secure the most appropriate storage environment.

This book covers every major topic area found on the exam, but it does not cover every exam question. Only the Microsoft exam team has access to the exam questions, and Microsoft regularly adds new questions to the exam, making it impossible to cover specific questions. You should consider this book a supplement to your relevant real-world experience and other study materials. If you encounter a topic in this book that you do not feel completely comfort-able with, use the "Need more review?" links you'll find in the text to find more information and take the time to research and study the topic. Great information is available on MSDN, on TechNet, and in blogs and forums.

Organization of this book

This book is organized by the "Skills measured" list published for the exam. The "Skills measured" list is available for each exam on the Microsoft Learn website: http://aka.ms/examlist. Each chapter in this book corresponds to a major topic area in the list, and the technical tasks in each topic area determine a chapter's organization. If an exam covers six major topic areas, for example, the book will contain six chapters.

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For information about Microsoft certifications, including a full list of available certifications, go to *http://www.microsoft.com/learn*.

Check back often to see what is new!

Quick access to online references

Throughout this book are addresses to webpages that the author has recommended you visit for more information. Some of these links can be very long and painstaking to type, so we've shortened them for you to make them easier to visit. We've also compiled them into a single list that readers of the print edition can refer to while they read.

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The URLs are organized by chapter and heading. Every time you come across a URL in the book, find the hyperlink in the list to go directly to the webpage.

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Describe how to work with relational data on Azure

Relational data is the most used storage since the last quarter of the past century. It is likely the concept most students study at the very beginning of their careers. You will find concepts about how the data is stored, and the best ways to design them, in hundreds of books. No matter what kind of information you want to preserve, a relational database is most likely a good option.

NOTE OTHER OPTIONS

As you will read in the next chapter, a relational database is not the only option, and in some cases, relational data storage is not the best choice.

Skills covered in this chapter:

- Skill 2.1: Describe relational data workloads
- Skill 2.2: Describe relational Azure data services
- Skill 2.3: Identify basic management tasks for relational data
- Skill 2.4: Describe query techniques for data using SQL language

Skill 2.1: Describe relational data workloads

Relational data storage is described as storing information based on a predefined structure of the information. Depending on the use of your data and your workload, you must select the technique that best matches your needs. Conceptually, in relational databases you try to define things to represent the entities in the real world, like persons, companies, products, bills, and so on. We use the term "relational" to describe the relation in the data represent-ing an entity, and not just because, for example, one bill could be related to a person and a customer and was generated by a company. Moreover, it can have several products in the details, and all these elements are related. All this information must be stored in some way, and that is what we will cover here.

This skill covers how to:

- Identify the right data offering for a relational workload
- Describe relational data structures

Identify the right data offering for a relational workload

If you analyze how your data has been managed in the past, usually you find one or more applications storing information in a centralized storage, probably a single database. Unless different business processes, or different areas, are involved with specific privacy or security reasons, you will find a lot of applications storing all the information in just one database. However, during recent years, this has been changing. A lot of information is now stored in several formats and places all around the world (in fact, all around the "cloud").

And this is an important matter to consider. Not only must you manage the data, but you also must get information from several sources and, probably, adapt it to match the way your business uses the information.

NOTE INFORMATION JOURNEY

Consider the information traveling in an information pipeline, where each station can modify, extract, change, or refine information. That is the way information is managed these days.

Online transaction processing (OLTP)

This workload is what we typically get from business transactions, like bank transfers, online shopping, and cash machines, that are preserved in a data store. It is the repository for any transaction related to the activities.

In a health-care system, the information about every patient and each event—disease or symptom, treatment, blood analysis, X-ray, and so forth—consists of activities for the system, and usually they are related in order to manage the information clearly.

The concepts about OLTP are well known. The workload has been deeply analyzed, and many rules have been defined to make OLTP work better. Probably the most important is the atomicity, consistency, isolation, durability (ACID) concept, which defines the properties of database transactions that must be completed to guarantee sustainable operations.

EXAM TIP

ACID is a very important concept. In this book, you have the basic definitions, but other resources elaborate on it. As a starting point, you can read the first article about this concept, "Principles of transaction-oriented database recovery," at *https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/289.291*.

ATOMICITY

The name "atomicity" derives from the concept of an atom. It is something that must be together. It is "all or nothing."

Consider this scenario: A patient requires treatment in the ER. The doctor needs some laboratory checks for diagnostics purposes. The doctor performs some procedures to cure the diagnosed disease.

When the procedures are completed, several pieces of information must be recorded:

- 1. The patient's symptoms
- 2. The list of laboratory checks
- 3. The result of those checks
- 4. Each procedure, medical instrument, medication and dosage
- 5. The closure: recommendations, future follow-up procedures, and so on

All this information and all the detailed costs of the procedures must be recorded as a single unit. It is not useful, for example, to have the symptoms without the laboratory results.

Ensuring that all the information is stored as one block, as an atom including all the parts at the same time, is *atomicity*.

CONSISTENCY

The information stored in a relational database usually has defined rules to ensure that all the information makes sense. Using the previous example, there is no sense in having the laboratory results without any indication of which patient they belong to, or the exact definition of the procedure.

Ensuring that the information can be related in a specific way in the future is consistency.

ISOLATION

Isolation ensures that other actors in the process do not access partial information.

Two different areas in the hospital using the same information must access the same data. If someone at the ER office is entering the information at the same time another person is preparing the bill, it will not be good if the second person obtains the already stored laboratory checks while the first person is still completing the registration of the procedures or drugs used to treat the patient.

During the update procedure, until the consistency has been maintained, the information for this specific transaction must be isolated from others.



EXAM TIP

There is some fine-tuning of isolation, the so-called *isolation levels*. It is important to understand how they modify the behavior of the reads in a database environment. You can learn more here: *https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/sql/connect/jdbc/understanding-isolation-levels*.

DURABILITY

Durability ensures that the information can be accessed later even after a system crash. Most relational database systems (RDBSs) use a mechanism to quickly store each step of an activity and then confirm all of them at the same time (known as a *commit*).

After the commit succeeds, the information is secure. Of course, IT departments must deal with external factors, but from a relational database point of view, the information is safe.

Online analytical processing (OLAP)

The OLAP workload, even when still a relational workload, was developed with data analysis in mind. You can think of it as looking to the past. The important element here is analyzing what happened instead of registering what is going on.

Using the previous example, OLAP will be used to evaluate how many patients the ER treated in the last week, or month, or year; how many require follow-up; the average number of laboratory procedures per patient; and so on.

The most important difference between OLTP and OLAP is that OLAP is implemented for reading big amounts of data for data analysis, whereas OLTP is designed for many parallel write transactions.

Another difference you can find in OLAP implementations is the fact that, usually, the OLAP data has been restructured to facilitate the queries.

Look at the partial entity-relationship diagram of products in the Adventure Works OLTP database, shown in Figure 2-1, and compare it with the diagram for products in the Adventure Works OLAP database, shown in Figure 2-2. The second one is more simplistic, but the tables contain more columns. Moreover, if you look at the Product table in the OLAP version, you will see that it has columns that are in other related tables in the OLTP model. That is because the OLAP data is *flattened* several times to accelerate the reads during the query process.

NOTE DIFFERENT SCHEMAS

Notice that the entities in both schemas do not have exact matches; they are used just as a sample to better illustrate OLAP database design and do not necessarily match the structured database design rules.

The OLAP database uses a *semantic model* instead of a *database schema*. The semantic model redefines the information from a business point of view, rather than using a structured point of view as the OLTP database schema does. This is because the business user, who is the final consumer for an OLAP implementation, knows the business entities but not the underlying data schema.

The semantic model usually contains calculations already performed, time-oriented calculations, aggregation from different tables to make it easier to read the information, and in some cases, aggregation from different sources.

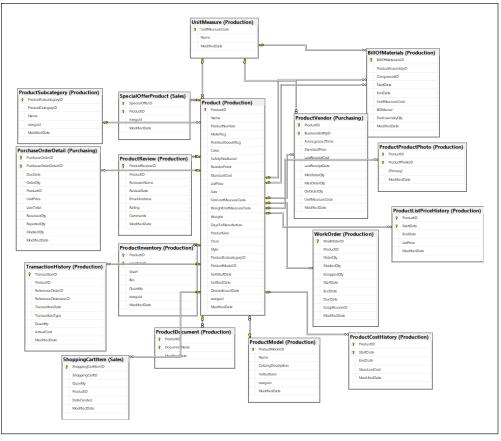


FIGURE 2-1 OLTP database product relationships

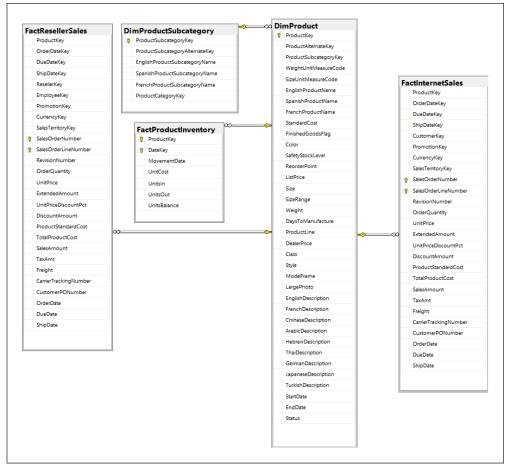


FIGURE 2-2 OLAP database product relationship

When you define an OLAP workload, you must decide which kind of semantic model to use, as shown in Table 2-1.

 TABLE 2-1
 OLAP semantic models

| OLAP Model | Description |
|------------------|--|
| Tabular | Like OLTP models, this model uses concepts such as tables, columns, and relationships. |
| Multidimensional | A more traditional OLAP approach is used, based on cubes, dimensions, and measures. |

Data warehousing

Using information from different sources, during a long period of time, implies keeping historical information in a secure, consistent way. Moreover, the storage solution must not burden the other workloads with the analytical process. This is where a data warehouse comes in.

A data warehouse is the place to store historical and current information, preprocessed in ways that facilitate the business analytical queries to get better results. In the implementation of a data warehouse, procedures are used to cleanse the data and make it consistent. Because the information can come from disparate sources, it must be preprocessed to facilitate better results from the business analytical queries.

Several different tools and procedures are available to keep the information up-to-date in a data warehouse, but all can be defined as a three-part process: extract the information from the sources; store the results in the data warehouse; and transform, process, and ensure data quality in some parts of the process.

Sometimes, you prefer to transform the data before storing it in the data warehouse (the extract, transform, and load [ETL] process). In other circumstances, it could be more reliable, more secure, or simply cheaper to move all the information into the data warehouse and then process it (the extract, load, and transform [ELT] process).

NEED MORE REVIEW? TRANSFORMATION PROCESSES

For more information about the transformation processes, review Skill 1.2, "Describe data analytics core concepts," in this book.

Describe relational data structures

Relational data is about having the information stored according to specific structures and predefined elements. This ensures the quality of the queries, the relationships, and the consistency of the information. The following are several concepts related to how the information is structured in relational data structures.

Tables

A *table* is the basic structure where data is stored. A table predefines the parts of the data, and the information stored in it must match the defined schema.

A table defines *columns* to identify each piece of information about the entity it stores. Consider the set of information in Table 2-2 (let's say it is information about sales regions).

TABLE 2-2 Table data sample

| Name | Country | Start | SalesLastYear |
|-----------|---------|------------|-----------------|
| North | US | 05/01/2010 | \$ 3,298,694.49 |
| Central | US | 06/01/2012 | \$ 3,205,014.08 |
| South | US | 03/01/2008 | \$ 5,366,575.71 |
| Canada | CA | 08/01/2010 | \$ 5,693,988.86 |
| France | FR | 09/01/2006 | \$ 2,396,539.76 |
| Germany | DE | 10/01/2012 | \$ 1,307,949.79 |
| Australia | AU | 11/01/2018 | \$ 2,278,548.98 |

To store the information, a relational database must have a table that defines the columns, including their properties. The column definition specifies not only the name of each column (which must be unique to the table), but also the type of information the column will contain in each entry.

In some cases, when the entities you want to store have different sizes, most database engines allow you to define a specific or a maximum size.

Also, you can apply other kinds of restrictions. In this example, just one column is allowed to have no value, since the first time a new entry is added, no value for that column is added (for example, a new region will not have sales from the previous year, since it is new). This concept is represented in Table 2-3.

| Column name | Туре | Size | Allow empty |
|---------------|------------|------|-------------|
| Name | Characters | 100 | No |
| Country | Characters | 2 | No |
| Start | Date | | No |
| SalesLastYear | Money | | Yes |

TABLE 2-3 Data columns and constrains

Each database engine has its own data type definitions. However, most of them define the same standards, often with different nomenclatures and some specific data types not shared with others. But the most important types are the same for all of them. Table 2-4 shows the various data types.

| Information Type | Standard Data types | | | |
|------------------|---------------------|--|--|--|
| Characters | Size | Data Types | | |
| | Fixed length | char nchar (Unicode) | | |
| | Variable length | varchar nvarchar (Unicode) | | |
| Numbers | Size | Data Types | | |
| | Integer | integer smallinteger biginteger tinyinteger | | |
| | Non-integer | decimal numeric float real double money | | |
| Other data | Size | Data Types | | |
| | Dates | smallDateTime dateTime time timespan | | |
| | Logical | bit | | |
| | Other | binary image Etc. | | |

TABLE 2-4 Standard data types



EXAM TIP

The name of *nvarchar*, or *nchar*, stands for *National CHAR*acters. Using the N at the beginning of the name signals that the data type is for Unicode/double-byte characters.

Indexes

When you have a lot of information stored in a table, finding a specific entry could be time consuming. Imagine yourself in a room with hundreds of thousands of folders of information, trying to find a specific entry. Without classifications, you are in for a lot of work to find the information you are searching for.

Now think about having each folder with hundreds of pages . . . you will have to lift each of the folders to see if it is the correct one. That can be heavy work!

Something similar occurs in the database engine.

Finding your folder will be so much easier if you have a collection of tabs, with the tabs ordered and just the most important information to identify each one of your folders. That way, you can quickly locate the folder you are looking for in all your libraries.

That is the concept behind indexes. Instead of you reading each entire row, one at a time, to find the entry you need, the system searches an index to get the exact location of the information in the table.

| * | Name 💌 | ProductNumber | Color | * | ProductNumber 🚽 ro | w 💌 |
|-----|--------------|---------------|--------|---|--------------------|-----|
| 317 | LL Crankarm | CA-5965 | Black | | CA-5965 | 317 |
| 318 | ML Crankarr | r CA-6738 | Black | | CA-6738 | 318 |
| 319 | HL Crankarn | n CA-7457 | Black | | CA-7457 | 319 |
| 320 | Chainring B | o CB-2903 | Silver | | CB-2903 | 320 |
| 321 | Chainring N | L CN-6137 | Silver | | CN-6137 | 321 |
| 322 | Chainring | CR-7833 | Black | | CR-7833 | 322 |
| 332 | Freewheel | FH-2981 | Silver | * | FC-3982 | 351 |
| 351 | Front Derail | II FC-3982 | Silver | | FH-2981 | 332 |
| | | | | | | |
| | - | | | | | |
| | | | 1 | | | |
| 352 | Front Derail | II FL-2301 | Silver | | FL-2301 | 352 |
| 461 | Lock Ring | LR-2398 | Silver | | FR-R928-58 | 680 |
| 679 | Rear Deraill | e RC-0291 | Silver | | LR-2398 | 461 |
| 680 | HL Road Fra | r FR-R928-58 | Black | | RC-0291 | 679 |

In Figure 2-3, you can see how the index search works.

FIGURE 2-3 Index search

In a similar way, indexes can combine more than one column for lookup purposes.

Indexes can be used to:

- Ensure uniqueness of each key in a table, defined as the unique key.
- Establish the most important key to search, called the primary key.
- Use relationships to speed up search correlation between data in columns in one table and the values of the column(s) of the primary key of another table.

Views

Once you have data stored in tables, you probably need to filter or regroup information in different ways for different users. Most important, it is often the case that not all the information stored in each table can be viewed by all your users. You might have sensitive information intended only for a subset of users or just a couple of columns some users need to view. In that case, you can use *views* to redefine the data to make it accessible in a reliable and secure form.

Consider a table with employee information. Any person in the company may need information from this table. However, salaries must not be visible to anyone except Human Resources personnel.

Here is another example. Suppose management needs the total sales by vendor, employee, year, and month. Instead of making management perform the calculation, you can have the information ready, in an already prepared view.

Keep in mind that the view does not *store* information. It is a virtual definition of how you want to see the information. Every time you query the view, the database platform will query the original table(s) to show you only the information you need.

A view is just a statement to query data from the table(s), not the final data. To enhance performance, when the database engine receives the order to store a view, it performs the following steps:

- 1. Checks the correctness of the statement itself
- 2. Verifies that all the columns and tables in use are present in the database
- 3. Determines the best plan to query the different parts of the data retrieved
- 4. Compiles the statement with that best plan (usually named the query or execution plan)

By doing this, the database engine, once executed the first time, will have the query plan in the cache and can use it.



EXAM TIP

Data changes with time. When the engine estimates a query plan, different tables can have a different number of rows, and the tables can have different amounts of data when it is required by the view.

That is why the data engine uses statistics to evaluate how much the data has changed.

If the statistics of one or more tables implied in a view are changed, the engine recalculates the query plan and stores the new one, before extracting the results.

Listing 2-1 is a sample of a view created to get information from five different tables.

LISTING 2-1 View sample

```
CREATE VIEW [Salestota]]
AS
   SELECT
      YEAR([Soh].[Duedate]) AS
                                                      [Year]
    , MONTH([Soh].[Duedate]) AS
                                                      [Month]
    , [Prod].[Name] AS
                                                      [Product]
    , [Per].[Lastname] + ', ' + [Per].[Firstname] AS [Vendor]
    , SUM([Sod].[Orderqty]) AS
                                                      [Quantity]
    , SUM([Sod].[Linetotal]) AS
                                                      [Tota]]
     FROM
          [Sales].[Salesorderdetail] AS [Sod]
          INNER JOIN
          [Sales].[Salesorderheader] AS [Soh]
          ON
             [Sod].[Salesorderid]
             = [Soh].[Salesorderid]
     INNER JOIN
     [Sales].[Salesperson] AS [Sp]
     ON
        [Soh].[Salespersonid]
        = [Sp].[Businessentityid]
        AND
        [Soh].[Salespersonid]
        = [Sp].[Businessentityid]
     INNER JOIN
     [Production].[Product] AS [Prod]
```

Index

NUMBERS

5 V's of big data, 12-19

SYMBOLS

* (asterisk), using with columns, 126 @ (at) symbol, using in SQL Server, 111

A

ABFS (Azure Blob Filesystem), 165, 168 ABFS or WASB drivers, 226 access management, 109-110 ACID (atomicity, consistency, isolation, durability), 48-50 acquisition, 4 AD (Active Directory). See Azure Active Directory ADF (Azure Data Factory) v2, 31-34 adjacency list, managing, 140-141 adjacency matrix, 140-141 AES (Advanced Encryption Standard), 108 aggregation and transformation, 4 AI, integrating in pipelines, 16 aliasing long names, 128 ALTER command, 124 Always On availability groups, SQL Server, 84 analytical access, 37 analytics curve, 23 analytics process, 42. See also data analytics analytics workloads, overview, 203-207 Apache Hive and HiveQL, 257

Apache Kafka, 5 Apache Oozie, 11, 233 Apache Spark, 35–36, 268. See also Azure Databricks Runtime ARM (Azure Resource Manager) templates, 95–103, 176-179 creating Cosmos DB account from, 178 getting from Cosmos DB account, 176–177 in GitHub, 181 asterisk (*), using with columns, 126 at (@) symbol, using in SQL Server, 111 atomicity in ACID, 49 attributes, 21 authentication managing, 108-111 issues with non-relational data, 193-194 authorization managing, 110 non-relational data, 189–190 AutoML (automated machine learning), 26. See also machine learning prediction auto-scaling, Azure HDInsight, 211 az module, using with PowerShell, 104 AzCopy, 196 Azure datacenter drawing, 59 event hubs and Apache Kafka, 5 services components, 62 services for non-relational workloads, 144 Azure account, obtaining, 1 Azure Active Directory, 110-111, 171 Azure Blob API, 167–168

Azure Blob storage

Azure Blob storage. See also blob storage API, 167-168 Azure Storage Explorer, 166–167 Blob driver, 165 containers, 164 content from PowerShell, 168-170 content types, 164 data for data analysis, 165 hierarchical structure, 165 .NET client library, 170 organization, 163-164 overview, 163 and Table storage, 144 Azure Cache for Redis, 144 Azure Calculator. 76 Azure CLI (command-line interface), 105-107, 181 Azure Cognitive Services, 16, 144 Azure Cosmos DB API account and database, 151-155 and Azure Data Explorer, 153 Azure Table, 151 Cassandra, 150-151 configuring consistency, 154 consistency levels, 145-147 Core (SQL), 150 creating account, 177-179 Data Migration tool, 154-155 deploying, 176-179 geo-redundancy, 153-154 getting ARM template from, 176–177 Gremlin (graph storage), 151 high availability, 147 importing data to, 154-155 IOPS (input/output operations per second), 147 JSON example, 149 MongoDB, 149-150 Notebook feature, 153 overview, 144-145 request units, 147-149 tokens, 146 using, 149-151

Azure Data Catalog, 18 Azure Data Explorer, 153, 194–196 Azure Data Factory Author menu item, 239–240 Azure Blog storage linked service, 248 characteristics, 233 components, 238-239 connectors, 245 Copy Data activity, 242-244 data integration units, 238 data sets, 244-245 data stores connectors, 245-247 expressions and functions, 249 features, 11, 17 home page, 235–236 IR (integration runtime), 237-238 mapping data flows, 271-276 monitoring, 254 parameters, 240 pipeline activities, 239-241 provisioning, 234–235 SSIS (SQL Server Integration Services), 237–238 templates, 235-236 testing connection, 248-249 triggers, 254 Azure Data Lake, accessing, 168 Azure Data Studio, 116-118 Azure databases MariaDB, 81-82 MySQL, 82-83 PostgreSQL, 79-81 Azure Databricks. See also Spark access to storage layer, 225 and Apache Spark, 207 Azure portal, 220–221 characteristics, 217-218 clusters, 227-229 connector for Azure Synapse Analytics, 278 control plane, 221–226 Delta Lake, 218 features, 35-36, 217-229, 262-263

joining data, 267 mounting external storage, 227-229 provisioning, 220-224, 227-229 PySpark, 267-268 source data in PySpark, 266 and Spark, 263-264 Spark RDDs, 219-220 specifying schemas, 264-265 Azure Databricks File System, 226 Azure Event Hubs, 206 Azure File Sync, 174 Azure Files storage. See also storage account mapping information, 173 authentication, 171-173 authorization, 173 Azure File Sync, 174 file share to local drive, 173-174 Kerberos authentication, 171–173 net use command, 174 overview, 170 SMB (Server Message Block) protocol, 170, 174 uploading files, 196 Azure HDInsight Ambari views, 214-215 appending content, 261 auto-scaling, 211 and Azure portal, 212-216 and Azure SQL Database, 213 clusters, 210, 212-216 considerations, 211 data processing options, 257-262 destination tables, 260-261 features, 11, 35, 206, 209-217 Hive optimization, 262 Hive tables and Azure Blog storage, 260 Hive View console, 258 internal and external tables, 258-259 and Linux, 212 programming languages, 216 provisioning Hadoop cluster, 216-217

SDKs and IDEs, 215 versions of components, 211 Azure Key Vault, 108, 185, 248. See also encryption Azure Kubernetes Service (AKS), 27 Azure Marketplace, 18 Azure ML (Machine Learning) Designer, 26-27 Azure .NET libraries, 181–182 Azure portal ARM templates, 102-103 and Azure HDInsight, 212-216 creating Cosmos DB account from, 177 features, 67-69, 90-95 Azure services, authorized by default, 183 Azure SQL Database. See also SQL (Structured Query Language) and Azure HDInsight, 213 creating, 67-69 features, 63 purchasing models, 64 segmentations, 64-66 service models, 67-69 using, 15, 89, 92, 108 Azure SQL-MI (Managed Instance), 83-86, 108 Azure Storage access tiers, 156-157 account types, 156 creating accounts, 158 deploying, 178-179 lifecycle management, 157 NFS v3, 158 performance levels, 155 replication options, 157 service exposition, 156 Azure Stream Analytics, 10, 206 Azure Synapse Analytics. See also PolyBase T-SQL query language; Synapse pool configuring PolyBase in, 269 CREATE EXTERNAL TABLE AS SELECT statement, 270 creating pools, 74 data processing capabilities, 231

Azure Synapse Analytics (continued)

language; Synapse pool (continued) external tables, 269–270 overview, 229–231 private and public preview, 276 provisioning SQL pool, 231–232 using, 12–13, 36, 69–74, 229–232 writing to blob storage, 270–271 Azure Table API, 151 Azure Table storage. *See also* tables API, 159–161 connecting to, 162–163 creating tables, 161–162 non-relational workloads, 144 OData specification, 159 overview, 158–159

В

batch data approach, 18-19 described, 10-12 versus streaming data, 19-20 workload type, 2 batch layer versus speed layer, 14 batch workload, 205-206 BI (business intelligence) projects, 29, 42. See also Power **BI** service big data value, 18 variety, 14-16 velocity, 14 veracity, 17-18 volume, 12-14 binary file formats, 16 Blob driver, 165 Blob service REST API, 167-168 blob storage. See Azure Blob storage managing content in, 168-170 writing to in Azure Synapse Analytics, 270-271 blobs, uploading content to, 196 blocking transformations, 31

BSON (Binary JSON), 139 B-tree storage, 137–138

С

Cached mode versus DirectQuery, 71 card visual, using in reports, 41 Cassandra API, 150-151 character data type, 55 charts and data visualization, 36-42 using in reports, 38-39, 41 CLI (command-line interface), using with Blob storage, 169-170 cloud, moving data to, 89 Cloud Shell, using with Azure CLI, 106-107 clustered columnstore indexes, 63. See also indexes Codd, Edgar F., 20 columnar data store, 139-140, 144 columnstore indexes, 63 commands ALTER, 124 DROP, 124 RENAME, 125 computing nodes, 72 connectivity issues, non-relational data, 190-194 connectivity issues, identifying, 112-114. See also network security consistency in ACID, 49 constraints, 21 consumer groups, 5-6 consumers, 4 Copy Data Wizard, 250-254 Core (SQL) API, 150 Cosmos Explorer, 197 costs, estimating for SQL server in VM, 76 CREATE EXTERNAL TABLE AS SELECT statement, 270 CREATE TABLE AS SELECT statement, 277 CRM (customer relationship management), 62 cube structure, SQL Server analysis services, 70 customer churn, 24

D

dashboarding access, 37 dashboards, 294–297. See also Power BI service data layered access to, 37 migrating with DMS, 84 volatility of, 14 data analytics. See also analytics process; on-demand data analysis core concepts, 23 techniques, 23-28 Data Control Language, 126 data encryption, 108, 184-185. See also Azure Key Vault data flows, mapping in Azure Data Factory, 271–276 data governance, 18 data ingestion and processing Azure Data Factory, 233-249 overview, 232 data integration units, Azure Data Factory, 238 data lake, 2 data loading, 276-278 Data Migration tool, downloading, 154–155. See also migrating data with DMS data pipelines data transformations, 28 sources and destinations, 28 data processing options Azure Data Factory, 271–276 Azure Databricks, 262-268 Azure HDInsight, 257-262 Azure Synapse Analytics, 268-271 output field list, 256-257 overview, 254-257 data protection, non-relational data, 185-186 Data Quality Services, 17 data secure layers, 107 data security components AzCopy, 196 Azure Data Explorer, 194–196 connectivity issues, 190-194

Cosmos Explorer, 197 management tools, 194-198 non-relational data workloads, 182-190 data security components, identifying, 107-110 data sets, 294 data stores for non-relational data choosing, 142 types, 137-142 data storytelling, 294 data stream, 3 data stream flow acquisition, 4 aggregation and transformation, 4 production, 3 storage, 4 data structures, classifications, 15-16 data virtualization, 13, 35 data visualization and chart types, 36-42 data warehouse architecture, 2, 19, 53, 207-208. See also modern data warehouses data warehousing Azure data services, 208-209 Azure HDInsight, 209-216 data workloads batch data, 10-19 streaming data, 3-10 types of, 1–2 database schema versus semantic model, 50. See also multidimensional databases DBFS (Databricks File System), 225 DDL (Data Definition Language), 123-125 Delete structure, 125 Delta Lake, Azure Databricks, 218 deployment managing with Azure CLI, 105–107 managing with PowerShell, 103-105 descriptive analysis, 23 diagnostic analysis, 23 dictionary and key-value store, 137 directed graph, 140 DirectQuery versus Cached mode, 71

disk images, creating, 76 DISM (Deployment Image Servicing and Management), 76 DML (Data Manipulation Language), 125–126 DMS (Database Migration Service), 84 document store, 138–139, 144 domains, 21 DROP command, 124 DTS (Data Transformation), 30 DTU-based purchase model, 64–67 durability in ACID, 50 DWUs (data warehouse units), 73 Dynamic Data Masking, 108

E

EDW (enterprise data warehouse), 42 elasticity, 60–61 ELT (extract-load-transform), 34–36, 205 encryption. *See* data encryption, 108, 184–185. *See also* Azure Key Vault encryption keys, configuring and storing, 185 ERP (enterprise resource planning), 62 errors, searching for, 114 ETL (extract-transform-load), 29–34, 205 Event Hub Capture, 5 event hubs, auditing, 109 events and session windows, 9–10 external storage, mounting, 227–229

F

Fiddler tool and connectivity issues, 190–191 file storage. *See* Azure Files storage firewall rules, non-relational data, 182–183 firewalls managing, 107–111 non-relational data, 182–183 form recognition, 16 FQDN (fully qualified domain name), 94 fraud detection, 24 Free Tier account, non-relational data, 177 FROM clause, 128 Fuzzy Lookup/Fuzzy Grouping, 17

G

geo-redundancy, Azure Cosmos DB API, 153–154 GIGO (garbage-in, garbage-out), 17 global distribution, 59 graph store, 140–141, 144 Gremlin (graph storage) API, 151 GRS (geo-redundant storage), 157 GZRS (geo-zone-redundant storage), 157

Η

Hadoop framework, 12–13, 209 hash table and key-value store, 137 HBase in HDInsight, 144 HDFS (Hadoop Distributed File System), 35, 210 HiveQL, 257 hopping window, 7–8 horizontal partitioning, 30

laaS (infrastructure as a service), 17, 60, 62 image classification, 16 incoming events, off-loading, 5 indexed information, searching, 144 indexes, relational database structures, 55–56. *See also* clustered columnstore indexes information protection, 108 retrieval, 16 in-memory technologies, 63 INNER JOIN clause, 128 input attributes as features, 24 input rate versus processing rate, 5 Insert structure, 125 IntelliSense, Azure Data Studio, 118 isolation in ACID, 49 IT (information technology) infrastructure, 58

J

JSON (JavaScript Object Notation), 15-16, 138-139

Κ

Kerberos authentication, Azure File storage, 171–173
key-value store, 137–138, 144
KPI (key performance indicator)

and dashboards, 294
and SQL Server analysis services, 71
using in reports, 41

L

law of the instrument, 254 LEFT OUTER JOIN, 129 lifecycle management, Azure Storage, 157 line chart, using in reports, 39 Linux and Azure HDInsight, 212 long names, aliasing, 128 LRS (locally redundant storage), 157

Μ

machine learning prediction, 16. *See also* AutoML (automated machine learning) map chart, using in reports, 41–42 MariaDB, 81–82 Master Data Services, 17 matrix visual, using in reports, 38 message identifications, 192 Microsoft Learn Path, 10, 19 SQL Server, 15 Microsoft SQL Server Enterprise Edition, 17 migrating data with DMS, 84. See also Data Migration tool MLFlow platform, 26 MLOPs (machine learning operations), 26 modern data warehousing. See also data warehouse architecture architecture and workload, 207-208 Azure Databricks, 217–229 Azure HDInsight, 209-217 Azure Synapse Analytics, 229–232 defined, 204 services, 208-209 MongoDB API, 149-150 monitor logs, 109 mounting external storage, 227-229 MPP (massively parallel processing) architectures, 12, 35, 72, 205 multidimensional databases, 69. See also database schema versus semantic model MySQL, 82-83, 131

Ν

names, aliasing, 128 NetMon (Network Monitor) tool, 191 network security, 111–112, 192. See also connectivity issues NFS v3, 158 non-relational data. See also relational data authentication, 186-189, 193-194 authorization, 189-190 Azure data services for, 144 characteristics, 136 choosing data stores, 142 columnar data store, 139-140 connectivity issues, 190-193 data protection, 185-186 deploying Azure Cosmos DB, 176 document store, 138-139 firewall rules, 182–183 Free Tier account, 177

non-relational data (*continued*) graph store, 140–141 identifying data services for, 144 key-value store, 137 object data store, 142 provisioning and deployment, 175 reasons for using, 143 secure transfer, 183–184 storage data encryption, 184–185 time series store, 141 TLS (Transport Layer Security) version, 184 non-relational workload, 205 NoSQL databases, 15, 136–142 numbers data type, 55 nvarchar (nchar) (National CHARacters), 55

0

object data store, 142, 144 OData specification, Azure Table storage API, 159–160 ODBC (Open Database Connectivity), 14 Office 365 SaaS, 62 OLAP (online analytical processing), 19, 22, 52 OLTP (online transaction processing), 22, 48–51 on-demand data analysis, 13. *See also* data analytics ONNX (Open Neural Network Exchange), 28 operating systems and SQL versions, 75 ORDER BY, 127, 130

Ρ

PaaS (platform as a service), 61–62 paginated reporting, 297–299. *See also* reports paginated reports, 42 partitioning, 30 pie chart, using in reports, 39–40 pinning objects on dashboards, 294–295 pipeline checking wealth of, 5 creating and running, 250–254

PoCs (proofs of concept), 207 policies and data protection, 186 PolyBase T-SQL query language. See also Azure Synapse Analytics configuring for Azure Blob storage, 268–269 configuring in Azure Synapse Analytics, 269 using, 14, 71-72 pool tables, 71 PostgreSQL databases, 79-81, 129-131 Power BI Desktop, downloading, 280 Power BI Report Builder, 298 Power BI Report Server, 299 Power BI service. See also BI (business intelligence) projects; dashboards connectors, 281–283 dashboards, 294-297 data alerting/notifications, 295 data modeling, 280 Data view, 285 dual tables, 283 exploring data, 296 Get Data window, 282 interactive reports, 279-293 Model view, 284, 287 overview, 278 paginated reporting, 297-299 plans and features, 291 portal, 292 Power Query Editor, 286, 288 publishing and sharing, 293 reading view, 293 release of, 42 Report view, 289-291 workflow, 279 PowerShell and Azure Storage, 178-179 commands for Cosmos DB, 179 creating Cosmos DB account from, 177 managing deployment, 103-105 storage account and container, 180-182 PowerShell Azure library, using with blob storage, 168-170 predictive analysis, 24 prescriptive analysis, 24 primary key, 21 private and public preview, 276 private connections, using, 192–193 procedures, relational databases, 58 process rate versus input rate, 5 producers, 3 PySpark file schema in, 265 joining data in, 267 source data in, 266 writing data to files, 267–268

Q

Query Editor, 115 Query Performance Insight, 64 query techniques, SQL language, 122–126 query tools, identifying, 114–122 querying data MySQL, 131 PostgreSQL databases, 129–131 SQL Server databases, 126–129

R

raw data, 4 RBAC (role-based access control), 171 regex (regular expressions), 17 relational Azure data services laaS (infrastructure as a service), 60 overview, 58–59 PaaS (platform as a service), 61 SaaS (software as a service), 61–62 relational data. *See also* non-relational data characters, 55 columns and constrains, 53–55 deployment of services, 87–90 indexes, 55–56

numbers, 55 procedures, 58 provisioning, 87-90 querying, 126-131 tables, 53-55 theory and practice, 20-22 types of, 55 views, 56-58 relational data services, provisioning and deploying, 87-90 relational workload, 204-205 **RENAME** command, 125 replication and data protection, 185 reporting access, 37 reports, visuals used in, 38-41. See also paginated reporting; SSRS (SQL Server Reporting Services) resource errors, 114 resource groups, 92 resource providers, ARM, 95-96 resources increasing and reducing, 60 overuse errors, 114 retention period, 5 road vehicle trips analysis, 4 routing preferences, non-relational data, 183

S

SaaS (software as a service), 61–62 scatter chart, using in reports, 40 schema drift, 14 secure transfer, non-relational data, 183–184 security. *See* data security components SELECT statement, 126–128 semantic model versus database schema, 50 semi-structured data, 15 sentiment analysis, 16 servers, registering, 174 serving layer, 42 session window, 9–10 shared resource model, 66 single source of truth, 22

sliding window

sliding window, 8-9 SLOs (service level objectives), 73-74 SMB (Server Message Block) protocol, Azure File storage, 170 SMEs (subject matter experts), 23 SMP (symmetric multiprocessing) systems, 12 soundex, 17 Spark, 35-36, 268. See also Azure Databricks speed layer versus batch layer, 14 SQL (Structured Query Language). See also Azure SQL Database operators, 21 query techniques, 122-131 SQL DW (Datawarehouse), 71 SOL Server adding, 69 Always On availability groups, 84 analysis services, 69-74 avoiding syntax errors, 111 on Azure VM (virtual machine), 74-79, 89-90 in-engine prediction, 27-28 implementing inside VM, 74-79 querying data, 126-129 SQL Server Reporting Services, 297 SQL versions and operating systems, 75 sqlcmd utility, 115-116 SQL-MI (Managed Instance), 83-86, 89 SSIS (SQL Server Integration Services) Enterprise Edition, 17, 30-33 SSIS workloads, migrating, 238 SSMS (SQL Server Management Studio), 110-111, 113, 118-121, 124 SSOT (single source of truth), 208 SSRS (SQL Server Reporting Services), 42. See also reports stacked column chart, using in reports, 38-39 statistics, use of, 57 storage, 4. See also Azure Files storage

storage account Azure portal, 95 and container using PowerShell, 180-182 creating, 158 storage data encryption, non-relational data, 184-185 storage devices, 144 Storage Explorer, 161–162, 166–167 stream processing overview, 4 stream processing pipeline, 3 stream window aggregation, 6 streaming data sets, 294 workload, 206 streaming data versus batch data, 19-20 use case, 4 structured data, 15

T

table visual, using in reports, 38 tables, relational database structures, 53-55. See also Azure Table storage tabular models, 71 TCO (total cost of ownership), 58 TDE (Transparent Data Encryption), 108 TDSP (Team Data Science Process), 24-26 Template URI, using for ARM templates, 181 threat protection, 109 time series store, 141, 144 time window aggregations, 5-6 TLS (Transport Layer Security), 184 transformations and aggregation, 4 performing, 34 processes, 53 T-SQL (Transact Structured Query Language), 21, 126–129 T-SQL query language, PolyBase, 14 tumbling window, 7 tuples, 21

U

unified analytics platform, 217 unstructured data, 16 Update structure, 125

V

value and big data, 18 variety and big data, 14–16 vCore-based purchasing model, 64–67 velocity and big data, 14 veracity and big data, 17–18 views, relational database structures, 56–58 Visual Studio Cloud Explorer, 197–198 visualization, 18 VM (virtual machine) implementing SQL Server in, 74–79 templates, 61 volatility of data, 14 volume and batch data, 12–14 VPNs (virtual private networks), 192

W

WASB or ABFS drivers, 226 watermarks, 5–6 WHERE predicate, 127 Wireshark network analyzer, 191 Word document, structure of, 136 workloads, types of, 2

Χ

XML (Extensible Markup Language) documents, 15, 138

Ζ

ZRS (zone-redundant storage), 157