



The Art of SQL

Stéphane Faroult , Peter Robson

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For all the buzz about trendy IT techniques, data processing is still at the core of our systems, especially now that enterprises all over the world are confronted with exploding volumes of data. Database performance has become a major headache, and most IT departments believe that developers should provide simple SQL code to solve immediate problems and let DBAs tune any "bad SQL" later.

In *The Art of SQL*, author and SQL expert Stephane Faroult argues that this "safe approach" only leads to disaster. His insightful book, named after Art of War by Sun Tzu, contends that writing quick inefficient code is sweeping the dirt under the rug. SQL code may run for 5 to 10 years, surviving several major releases of the database management system and on several generations of hardware. The code must be fast and sound from the start, and that requires a firm understanding of SQL and relational theory.

The Art of SQL offers best practices that teach experienced SQL users to focus on strategy rather than specifics. Faroult's approach takes a page from Sun Tzu's classic treatise by viewing database design as a military campaign. You need knowledge, skills, and talent. Talent can't be taught, but every strategist from Sun Tzu to modern-day generals believed that it can be nurtured through the experience of others. They passed on their experience acquired in the field through basic principles that served as guiding stars amid the sound and fury of battle. This is what Faroult does with SQL.

Like a successful battle plan, good architectural choices are based on contingencies. What if the volume of this or that table increases unexpectedly? What if, following a merger, the number of users doubles? What if you want to keep several years of data online? Faroult's way of looking at SQL performance may be unconventional and unique, but he's deadly serious about writing good SQL and using SQL well. *The Art of SQL* is not a cookbook, listing problems and giving recipes. The aim is to get you-and your manager-to raise good questions.

The Art of SQL Details

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Nigel Stanger says

If you think you're an SQL expert, you need to read this book. This guy really knows how SQL works internally, and the tricks for getting the best performance out of it. He claims that most database performance problems are actually the fault of poor database and query design, and then backs it up with experimental evidence, so he clearly knows what he's talking about. I've been teaching database tuning for nearly ten years now, and I learned a **lot** from this book.

The metaphor used for presenting the material is Sun Tzu's Art of War. That is, Faroult treats the process of query and database design as a battle, where you are fighting off the enemy (performance slowdowns) to reach your objectives (the data you need). He even uses most of the same chapter titles as the original, and the work is peppered with dozens of pithy summaries of the key points.

A warning though: only read this book if you really are an SQL expert. In the introduction, Faroult says that the book is intended for developers with at least five years experience in SQL. Some of the the topics are definitely not for the faint-hearted, but if you meet the requirements, you'll find it an enlightening experience.

Jeremy Carman says

Great book. Some really useful deep knowledge in it.

John says

The Art of SQL

By Stéphane Faroult, Peter Robson

As we know, there are known knowns. There are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns. That is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns, the ones we don't know we don't know. - Donald Rumsfeld (Sun Tzu's second millennium CE incarnation.)

The Art of SQL is no Web Database Applications with PHP and MySQL. It's far beyond that; it is well past even Practical PostgreSQL and the SQL Cookbook. Not only is it written for the experienced user, it is for the *ambitious* user, the one who wakes up with a smile trying to retain the n -dimensional join from their dream.

The excellent style of writing used is above the great O'Reilly par. Not only is the text concise and well edited, the book is organized very well. In a graceful and creative turn, the presentational style of the book is allusive to Sun Tzu's Art of War; query diagrams, sample datasets, and business cases are rendered as plans of attack and battle formations in the Napoleonic era. The result is phenomenal, and structurally, this book is groundbreaking - no computer science book I've read prior has had so much attention paid to making its

content engaging and enjoyable to consume - this is certainly not necessary, but it is a great indication of the overall quality of the book.

The book is SQL implementation agnostic and assumes the reader is interested in data integrity, extensibility, and scalability in the database. It assumes that you care, or want to care, whether you're following third normal form. In fact, the implied understanding here is that an earnest investment in normalization will pay dividends in optimization. Only if you're willing to perspire for it - it is an art, not a school of magic.

The SQL enthusiast will learn a lot from this book - perhaps a baffling amount. I absolutely cannot recommend it highly enough. It has been some time coming, the sort of thing that is an obvious boon when one considers that our 'art' has only been around for a few decades. We'll get it right eventually, inspired by those like Faroult and Robson.

Mike says

This book may have been named after Sun Tzu's classic on military matters, but in substance it reminded me more of another renowned tome on organized conflict, Clausewitz's *On War*.

The author clearly has a lot of experience and he brings his considerable understanding to bear on how to best decide on a strategy, and on what tactics to use once a proper course has been set.

It has been said there is no substitute for experience. Even so, it never hurts to draw on the experience of others as one measures a new terrain.

Thomas says

I got a lot out of the first half or so of this book. It did a great job helping me build a better mental model of how a database and query engine works internally, and what tradeoffs various techniques and design choices might be making. I wound up skimming some of the latter sections on data warehousing and relational tree building/querying techniques.

Terran M says

This is an excellent book on advanced SQL, suitable for reading when you are already fluent in SQL and ready to go the next level. This book is about as advanced as it is possible to get with SQL without going into implementation details of specific databases.

John Chilton says

I think this book is wildly overrated, so much so that I am thinking about giving it another chance sometime despite my deep dislike of it. I started reading it and I barely got through three chapters before giving up. Paragraph to paragraph there is no narrative, no connection. It is entirely disjointed. There are chapter titles,

but they seem to be a gimmick that have very little to do with the content in the chapters.
