

Form and function are a unity, two sides of one coin. In order to enhance function, appropriate form must exist or be created.

—Ida P. Rolf

Data entry is the unglamorous side of Access. Sure, entering a record or two isn't so bad, but entering dozens of records quickly becomes a chore you'd do anything to avoid. The datasheet techniques presented in Chapter 25, "Working with Tables," can help, but the datasheet isn't the most attractive way to get information into a table. You can take some of the drudgery out of data entry by using *forms*.

In the real world, we deal with forms of various descriptions all the time—application forms, registration forms, license renewals, deposit slips, traffic tickets (one of my specialties, unfortunately). It's a rare day that goes by without some officious person tossing a form our way and telling us to fill it out in triplicate.

Paper forms, then, are documents with blank boxes that you use to fill in the required information. Each box usually has a label beside it to let you know what kind of information to enter. Access *forms* are basically the same as their paper counterparts. As you can see in Figure 27.1, a form is a window that displays, for each field in the table, a text box, drop-down list, check box, or other control.

FIGURE 27.1.

An example of an Access form.

The screenshot shows an Access form window titled "Orders". It contains the following fields and controls:

- Bill To:** Allied: Fueterhite, Obere Str. 57, Berlin, 12209, Germany
- Ship To:** Allied: Fueterhite, Obere Str. 57, Berlin, 12209, Germany
- Salesperson:** Suyana, Michael
- Ship Via:** Speedy, United, Federal
- Order ID:** 10643, **Order Date:** 25 Sep 95, **Required Date:** 23-Oct-95, **Shipped Date:** 03-Oct-95
- Table of Order Items:**

Product	Unit Price	Quantity	Discount	Extended Price
Spege-ald	\$12.00	2	25%	\$18.00
Chaitreue verte	\$18.00	21	25%	\$283.50
Prozde Sauerk rauf	\$45.60	15	25%	\$513.00
- Summary:** Subtotal: \$814.50, Freight: \$29.46, Total: \$843.96
- Print Invoice** button
- Record:** 1 of 831

Forms bring a number of advantages to the data entry table:

- Since the form shows only one record at a time, you can see all the table fields at once (unless your table has a large number of fields). In contrast, you can usually see only four or five columns at a time in a datasheet.
- Controls such as drop-down lists reduce the possibility of data-entry errors by giving the user a limited set of choices for a field.
- Access gives you a number of customization options. This lets you create Access forms that look exactly like paper forms, and you can add graphics and other objects to make the forms more interesting.

- You aren't distracted by other data in the table, so you can give your full attention to the task at hand.

This chapter shows you not only how to create a form, but also how to customize it to your liking.

Creating a Form with AutoForm

By far the easiest way to create a form is to use the AutoForm feature. It lets you create quick-and-dirty data entry forms with just a few clicks of the mouse. AutoForms—which you can use only on existing tables or queries—are fast and ask no questions. Access gives you a number of ways to work with AutoForm (and, as you'll see, the method you use determines the form layout you get):

- You can create an AutoForm directly from the Tables or Queries tabs.
- You can run one of the AutoForm Wizards.
- You can display the form design window and choose an AutoFormat from there.

Running AutoForm Directly on a Table or Query

If all you want is a basic no-muss, no-fuss form, run the AutoForm feature directly from the Tables or Queries tabs. Specifically, highlight the table or query you want to use as the basis for the form, and then use either of the following techniques:

- Select Insert | AutoForm.
- Drop down the New Object button on the toolbar and choose AutoForm.

Access analyzes the selected table or query and then creates a simple form like the one shown in Figure 27.2. As you can see, the resulting form uses a columnar layout that shows the name of each field and provides a text box for the data. (Yes/No fields get a check box instead.)

FIGURE 27.2.

A basic form created with AutoForm.

The screenshot shows a form window titled "Customers" with a columnar layout. The fields and their values are as follows:

Customer ID	12345
Company Name	Gilbert Frittel y te
Contact Name	Maria Ander
Contact Title	Sale Representative
Address	Obere Str. 57
City	Berlin
Region	
Postal Code	12205
Country	Germany
Phone	030-0074331
Fax	030-0076545

At the bottom of the form, there is a record navigation bar showing "Record: 1 of 91".



Running an AutoForm Wizard

For more control over the form layout and extra formatting, Access has three AutoForm Wizards that you can use. To try them, use any of the following methods:

- Highlight a table or query (this is optional) and select Insert | Form.
- Highlight a table or query (again, this is optional), drop down the New Object button on the toolbar, and select Form.
- Activate the Forms tab and click New.



Access displays the New Form dialog box, shown in Figure 27.3. Highlight one of the AutoForm Wizards:

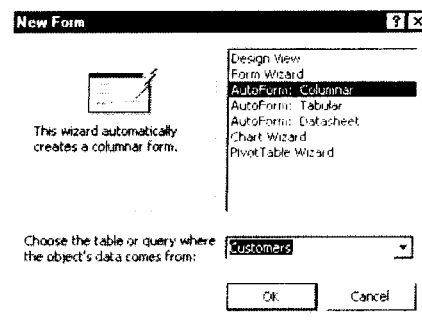
AutoForm: Columnar: This wizard creates a form with a columnar layout similar to the one shown in Figure 27.2.

AutoForm: Tabular: This wizard creates a form with a tabular layout that shows the field names at the top and the records in rows.

AutoForm: Datasheet: This wizard creates a form with a datasheet layout.

FIGURE 27.3.

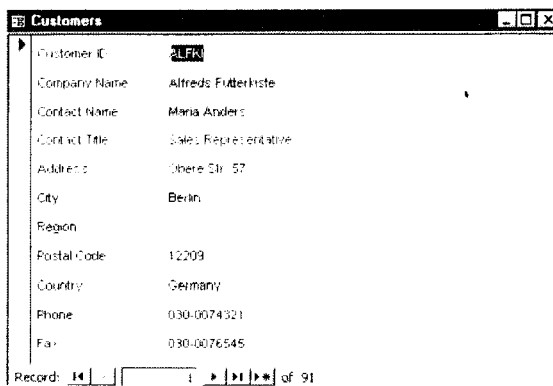
Use this dialog box to choose which of the AutoForm Wizards you want to run.



Use the drop-down list to select a table or query to use for the underlying data, and then click OK. Without further ado, the AutoForm Wizard constructs the form. As you can see in Figure 27.4, the forms created by these wizards also include some formatting. (The formatting you see might be different from that shown in Figure 27.4. I'll show you how to change this formatting in the next section.)

FIGURE 27.4.

The AutoForm Wizards create forms that have various formatting frills.



Assigning an AutoFormat in Design View

The AutoForm feature actually has 10 different predefined form layouts (called *AutoFormats*). The AutoForm Wizards always apply the default format. To choose another, you need to enter the form design window:

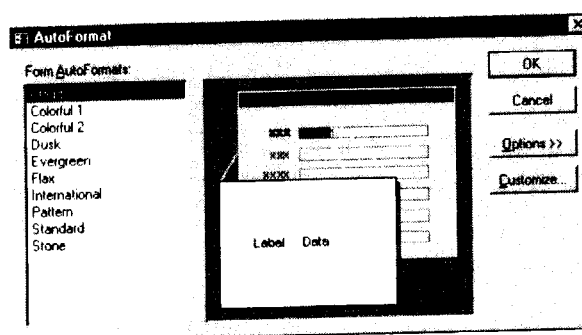
- If you're starting a new form, highlight Design View in the New Form dialog box, select the table or query, and click OK.
- If your form is already on-screen, either select View | Design View or click the Design View button on the toolbar.



From here, select Format | AutoFormat to display the AutoFormat dialog box, shown in Figure 27.5. The Form AutoFormats control contains a list of the available layouts. Highlight the one you want and click OK. Note that the default layout used by the AutoForm Wizards is always the *last* AutoFormat that you selected in this dialog box.

FIGURE 27.5.

Use this dialog box to select the AutoFormat you want to use.



Note, too, that you can customize these AutoFormats to suit your taste. If you click the Customize button in the AutoFormat dialog box, Access displays another dialog box that lets you perform one of three actions:

- Create a new AutoFormat template based on the formatting used in the current form.
- Change the current AutoFormat template based on the formatting used in the current form.
- Delete the current AutoFormat template.

Creating Simple Forms with the Form Wizard

The AutoForm feature is a fast way to create a form, but it suffers from a lack of interaction. In other words, you have no way of specifying the fields you want to see or the formatting style you want to use. For more control over your forms, you need to use the Form Wizard. The Form Wizard is more like a traditional Office wizard: It displays a series of dialog boxes that take you step-by-step through the entire form-creation process.

NOTE: WORKING WITH MULTIPLE TABLES

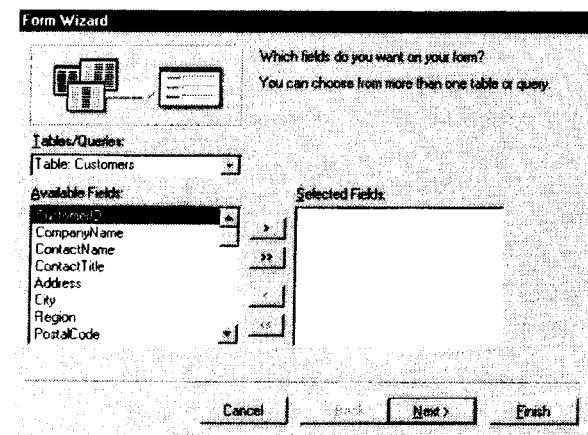
The Form Wizard even lets you select fields from multiple tables. When using multiple tables and queries, however, you must have the relationships between those tables and queries established. When the relationships are established, the joins (inner, outer left, or outer right) will be used in the creation of the SQL statement needed for the Record Source property of the form. See Chapter 29, “Juggling Multiple Tables,” for more information.

To access the Form Wizard, start a new form as described earlier. In the New Form dialog box, highlight the Form Wizard item, select a table or query (this is optional), and click OK.

In the first of the Wizard’s dialog boxes, shown in Figure 27.6, use the Table/Queries list to choose the underlying data source for the form (if you haven’t done so already). Then, for each field you want to include in the form, highlight the field in the Available Fields list and click the > button. (If you want to select all the fields, click the >> button.) When you’re done, click Next >.

FIGURE 27.6.

Use this Form Wizard dialog box to select the table or query and the fields you want to use.

**NOTE: YOU CAN'T BASE FORMS ON ACTION QUERIES**

The Table/Queries list includes all the database tables, but only the select queries. Action type queries can't have forms or reports based on them. (See Chapter 26, “Querying Data,” to learn about the differences between a select query and an action query.)

The next Form Wizard dialog box, shown in Figure 27.7, asks you to choose the layout of the fields. You have four choices:

Columnar: The fields are arranged in columns, and only one record is shown at a time.

Tabular: The fields are arranged in a table, with the field names at the top and the records in rows.

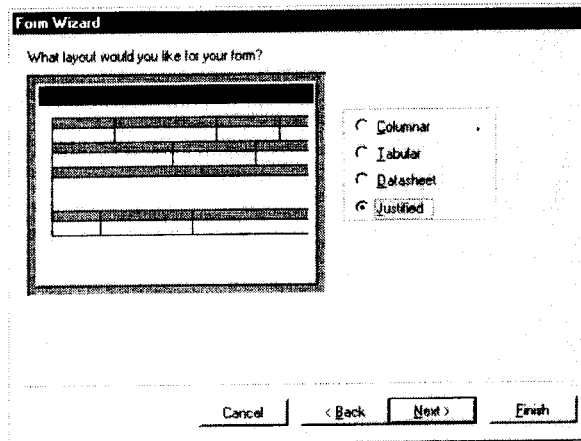
Datasheet: The fields are arranged in a datasheet layout.

Justified: The fields are arranged across and down the form with the field names above their respective controls.

Choose the layout option you want and click OK.

FIGURE 27.7.

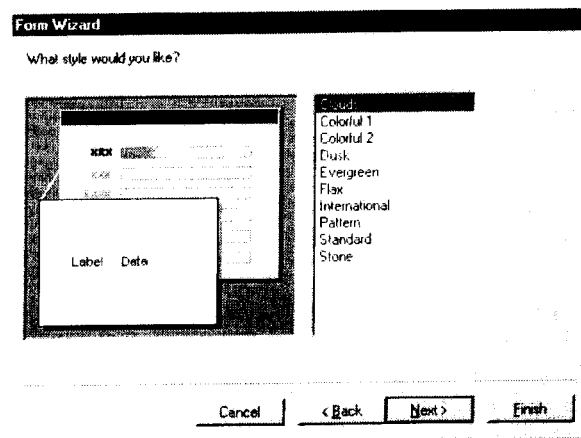
Use this Wizard dialog box to choose the form layout.



The next Wizard dialog box, shown in Figure 27.8, asks you to select one of the predefined AutoForm templates. Highlight the template you want to use and click OK.

FIGURE 27.8.

Use this dialog box to choose an AutoForm template.



The fourth and last Wizard dialog box, shown in Figure 27.9, lets you modify the name of the form. A suggestion is already in place in the What title do you want for your form? text box; it's based on the name of the underlying table or query. This dialog box also lets you open the form to enter data or to modify the form's design. When you've made your choice, click Finish to complete the form.