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John Kaufeld
Author of Access 2002 For Dummies

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Access 2003 FOR DUMMIES®

by John Kaufeld

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About the Author

John Kaufeld got hooked on computers a long time ago. Somewhere along the way, he discovered that he really enjoyed helping people resolve computer problems. John finally achieved his B.S. degree in management information systems from Ball State University and he became the first PC support technician for what was then Westinghouse near Cincinnati, Ohio.

Since then, he has logged nearly a decade of experience working with normal people who were stuck with a "friendly" PC that turned on them. He's also trained more than 1000 people in many different PC and Macintosh applications. Today, John conducts media skills and promotion seminars for up-and-coming entrepreneurs and writes in his free moments. His other ventures include More Than Games, an amazingly cool board and card game store (www.morethangames.com); ShipperTools.com, a shipping system that helps small businesses and eBay sellers save money with the US Postal Service (www.shippertools.com); and his Feed the News Beast small-business seminars (www.feedthenewsbeast.com).

His other titles include the best-selling *AOL For Dummies*, plus too many other database and Internet books to leave him emotionally unscarred. John lives with his wife, two children, and two gerbils in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Dedication

To Jenny, because without you, I'd be completely nuts.

To J.B. and the Pooz for reminding Daddy to smile when all he could do was write.

To John Wiley & Sons for the opportunity of a lifetime.

My sincere thanks to you, one and all.

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As with any good magic trick, there's more to putting out a book than meets the eye. Granted, writing a book like this demands long periods of intense sitting, but it actually takes a team of intense sitters to complete the finished product you hold in your hands.

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Introduction

Being a normal human being, you probably have work to do. In fact, you may have *lots* of work piled precariously around your office or even stretching onto the Internet. Someone, possibly your boss (or, if you work at home, your Significant Other), suggested that Access may help you do more in less time, eliminate the piles, and generally make the safety inspector happy.

So you picked up Access, and here you are. Whee!

About This Book

If you feel confused instead of organized, befuddled instead of productive, or just completely lost on the whole database thing, *Access 2003 For Dummies* is the book for you. And don't worry — you aren't alone in those feelings. Unlike word processors and presentation programs, few people catch on to databases by themselves. (Those few who manage the feat usually turn into computer support people as a way of working through the trauma.)

This book has a simple purpose: to show you how Access works, what to do with it, and why you might actually care, while carefully *not* turning you into a world-class nerd in the process. What more could you want?

Conventions Used in This Book

Every now and then, you need to tell Access to do something or other. Likewise, there are moments when the program wants to toss its own comments and messages back to you (so be nice — communication is a two-way street). To easily show the difference between a human-to-computer message and vice-versa, I format the commands differently.

Here are examples of both kinds of messages as they appear in the book.

This is something you type into the computer.

```
This is how the computer responds to your command.
```

Because Access *is* a Windows program, you don't just type all day — you also mouse around quite a bit. Although I don't use a cool font for mouse actions,

I *do* assume that you already know the basics. Here are the mouse movements necessary to make Access (and any other Windows program) work:

- **Click:** Position the tip of the mouse pointer (the end of the arrow) on the menu item, button, check box, or whatever else you happen to be aiming at, and then quickly press and release the left mouse button.
- **Double-click:** Position the mouse pointer as though you're going to click, but fool it at the last minute by clicking twice in rapid succession.
- **Click and drag (highlight):** Put the tip of the mouse pointer at the place you want to start highlighting and then press and hold the left mouse button. While holding down the mouse button, drag the pointer across whatever you want to highlight. When you reach the end of what you're highlighting, release the mouse button.
- **Right-click:** Right-clicking works just like clicking, except that you're exercising the right instead of the left mouse button.

Of course, the Access menu comes in handy, too. When I want you to choose something from the main menu bar, the instruction looks like this:

Choose File➪Open Database.

If you think that mice belong in holes, you can use the underlined letters as shortcut keys to control Access from the keyboard. To use the keyboard shortcut, hold down the Alt key and press the appropriate underlined letter. In the example above, the keyboard shortcuts are Alt+F, then Alt+O. Press them one right after the other, with the Alt key down the whole time.

If you aren't familiar with all these rodent gymnastics, or if you want to know more about Windows in general, pick up a copy of one of the many *Windows For Dummies* titles. Every version of Windows has one!

What You Don't Have to Read

Must you completely ingest this entire tome before understanding Access? Goodness, no! (Besides, I don't think the book ingests well — at least not without a trip or two through the shredder.) Certain stuff made it into the book simply because I couldn't find any way to leave it out.

For one thing, feel free to ignore anything marked by the Technical Stuff icon, like the one next to this paragraph. You don't need to know the stuff marked by these little signposts to make Access function helpfully in your world. If you *feel* like going deeper into the uncharted depths of the program, you can always start the trip with a glance at the Technical Stuff texts.

If you use Access only for working with your company's big corporately designed databases, don't worry about the database design chapter. Your Information Systems department probably won't let you mess around with the database structure anyway, so why worry with design details in the meantime?

Foolish Assumptions

You need to know only a few things about your computer and Windows to get the most out of *Access 2003 For Dummies.* (Turning yourself into a full-bore computer nerd is totally out of the question.) In the following pages, I presume that you

- Know the basics of whichever flavor of Windows you're using.
- Want to work with databases that other people have created.
- Want to use and create queries, reports, and an occasional form.
- Want to make your own databases from scratch every now and then.
- Have Microsoft Windows 98, 98 SE, ME, 2000, NT 4, or any flavor of XP, and Access for Windows on your computer (if you have the entire Office suite, that's fine, too). If your computer still uses Windows 95, spend some quiet time with the machine. After that, give it a decent burial and go splurge on a new computer. Your old one deserves a well-earned rest (and you deserve a gold star for putting up with an old machine for that long).

The good news is that you don't have to know (or even care) about table design, field types, relational databases, or any of that other database stuff to make Access work for you. Everything you need to know is right here, just waiting for you to read it.

How This Book Is Organized

To give you an idea of what's ahead, here's a breakdown of the six parts in this book. Each part covers a general topic of Access. The part's individual chapters dig into the details.

Part 1: Which Came First, the Data or the Base?

Right off the bat, this book answers the lyrical question "It's a data-*what?*" By starting with an overview of both database concepts in general and Access in particular, this book provides the information you need to make sense of the

whole database concept. This part also contains suggestions about solving problems with (or even *without*) Access. If you're about to design a new Access database to fix some pesky problem, read this section first — it may change your mind.

Part II: Truly Tempting Tables

Arguably, tables (where the data lives) are at the center of this whole database hubbub. After all, without tables, you wouldn't have any data to bully around. This part gives you the information you need to know about designing, building, using, changing, and generally coexisting in the same room with Access tables.

Part III: Finding the Ultimate Answer to Almost Everything

If tables are at the center of the Access universe, then queries are the first ring of planets. In Access, queries ask the power questions; they unearth the answers you *know* are hiding somewhere in your data. In addition to covering queries, this part also explains how to answer smaller questions using Find, Filter, and Sort — Query's little siblings.

Part IV: Turning Your Table into a Book

Seeing your data on-screen just isn't enough, sometimes. To make your work *really* shine, you have to commit it to paper. Part IV covers the Access report system, a portion of the software entirely dedicated both to getting your information onto the printed page and to driving you nuts in the process.

Part V: Wizards, Forms, and Other Mystical Stuff

At some point, technology approaches magic (one look at the control panel for a modern microwave oven is proof of that). This part explores some of the mystical areas in Access, helping you do stuff faster, seek assistance from the wizards, get your computer to do what you want just by talking to it, and

even venture into a bit of programming. If the Internet's limitless possibilities pique your online fancy, look in this part for info about the new Web connectivity features in Access. They're really amazing!

Part VI: The Part of Tens

The words *For Dummies book* immediately bring to mind the snappy, irreverent Part of Tens. This section dumps a load of tips and cool ideas onto, and hopefully *into,* your head. You can find a little bit of everything here, including timesaving tips and the solutions to the most common problems awaiting you in Access.

Icons Used in This Book

When something in this book is particularly valuable, I go out of my way to make sure that it stands out. I use these cool icons to mark text that (for one reason or another) *really* needs your attention. Here's a quick preview of the ones waiting for you in this book and what they mean:

Tips are *really* helpful words of wisdom that promise to save you time, energy, and perhaps some hair. Whenever you see a tip, take a second to check it out.

Some things are too important to forget, so the Remember icon points them out. These items are critical steps in a process — points that you don't want to miss.

Despite my best efforts, sometimes I give in to the nerdy side and slip some technical twaddle into the book. The Technical Stuff icon protects you from obscure details by making them easy to avoid. If you're in an adventuresome mood, check out the technical stuff. You may find it interesting.

The Warning icon says it all: *Skipping this information may be hazardous to your data's health.* Pay attention to these icons and follow their instructions to keep your databases happy and intact.

Where to Go from Here

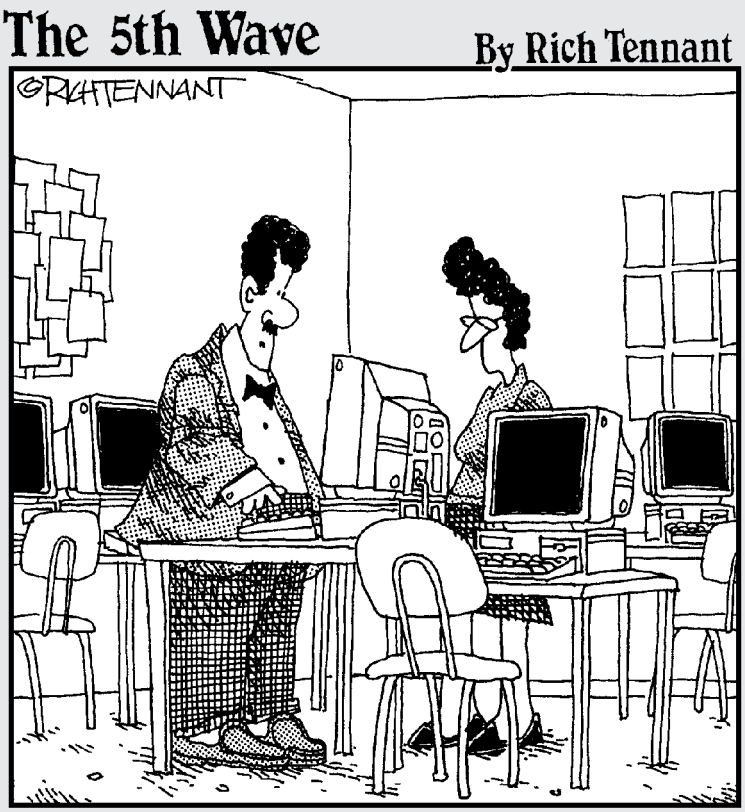
Now nothing's left to hold you back from the wonders of Access. Cleave tightly to *Access 2003 For Dummies* and dive into Access.

- If you're brand new to the program and don't know which way to turn, start with the general overview in Chapter 1.
- If you're about to design a database, I salute you — and recommend flipping through Chapter 4 for some helpful design and development tips.
- Looking for something specific? Try the Table of Contents or the Index, or just flip through the book until you find something interesting.

Bon voyage!

Part I

Which Came First, the Data or the Base?



"Our classroom PCs have created a challenging atmosphere where critical analyzing, synthesizing, and problem-solving skills are honed. I think the students have gotten a lot out of them, too."

In this part . . .

Everything starts somewhere. It's that way with nature, with science, and with meatballs that roll down your tie. So what more fitting way to begin this book than with a look at where databases start — as a glimmer in someone's mind.

This part opens with a heretical look at problem solving, and then moves along to cover the highlights of Access itself. A little later in this part, you discover the secrets of good data organization and where to find help when the world of Access gets you down.

All in all, this part is a pretty good place to start — whether you're new to the database concept or just to Access. Either way, welcome aboard!

Chapter 1

The 37-Minute Overview

In This Chapter

- Starting the program
- Opening a database that's already there
- Thumbing through the parts of a database
- Finding a record
- Changing a record
- Printing a report
- Saving your changes
- Getting out when you're finished

It's confession time. This chapter probably takes longer than 37 minutes to finish. Then again, you may spend *less* time than that if you're somewhat familiar with the program or if you're a speed-reader. Either way, the chapter *does* give you a good overview of Access 2003 from start to finish (and I mean that literally).

Because the best way to get into Access is to literally *get into* it, this chapter leads you on a wild, galloping tour of the software, covering the highlights of what you and Access will probably do together on a daily basis. Think of the chapter as a "Day in the Life" story, designed to show you the important stuff.

If you're new to Access 2003, this chapter makes a good starting point. If you're familiar with older versions of Access, I recommend that you skim this chapter anyway to see the changes introduced in this new version. Enjoy the trip!

In the Beginning, There Was Access 2003

To start Access, click the Start button and choose Microsoft Access 2003 from the Start menu (see Figure 1-1). If Access is hiding from you, look for a program group with a name such as Office or Microsoft.

Figure 1-1: For a smart program, Access 2003 doesn't hide very well.

If you still can't find Access on the Start menu, you have to create your own shortcut (egads!). Follow these steps to create a shortcut:

1. **Click the Start button. Then, depending on which version of Windows you use, choose Find➪Files or Folders or choose Search➪For files and folders.**

   The Find: All Files dialog box appears.

2. **For the file name, type** msaccess.exe**, and then click Find Now.**

   Windows finds the program file.

   If Windows finds two copies of the program (as Figure 1-2 shows), that usually means your system has both an older *and* a newer version of Access installed. To tell the two programs apart, right-click the first entry, and choose Properties from the pop-up menu. A little window appears, sharing all kinds of nifty information about the file. Click the Version tab along the top of the little window. For Access 2003, the file version number should start with 11. If it begins with something smaller than 11, close the window and repeat the process with the other file. If