



# Demystify & Democratize Find Tool SQL

*Strategies for Engaging Trainings*

Suri Smith



AKA...Create  
Trainings that  
Don't Suck

*Yes, really*

# What is this?



It's **not** Find Tool  
SQL training.



It **is** training about how  
to do that training.  
*Trainception...*

# Who am I?

Primary Polaris and circulation trainer for Lexington County Public Library.

Ten branches and ~150 staff.

LCPL recently implemented Find Tool SQL training available to all staff members. You want to know it, you can sign up for it.

And boy, do they want to know it!

# DEMYSTIFY

#IUG2025

**IUG 2025**

# You can lead staff to SQL, but how do you make them (not want to) drink?



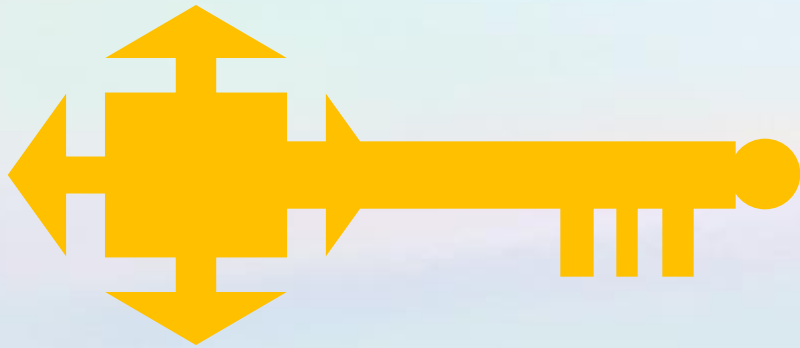
ACCESSIBLE



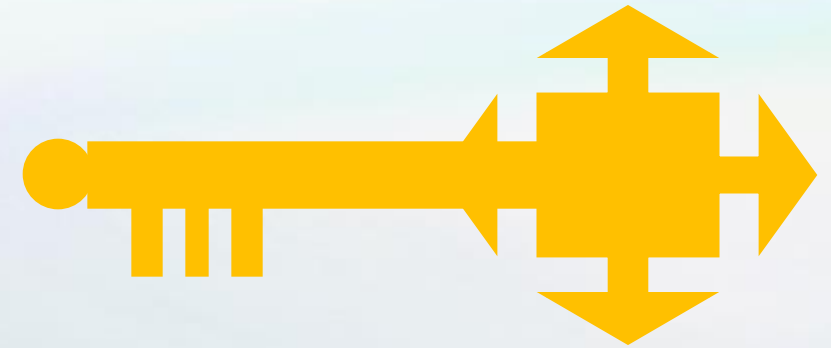
INVITING



RELEVANT



Unlock  
effective  
training



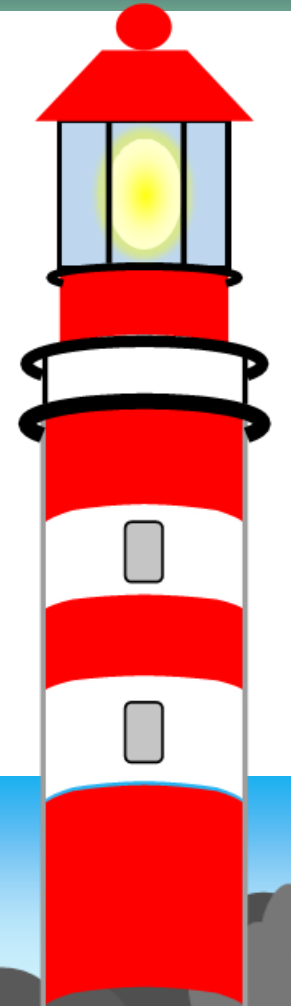
# Banish the Mist\*

## SQL = Scared, Questioning & Lost?

Training is a welcome mat for staff. They need:

- Plain language introduction
- Connections to functions they already know
- Repetitions of important information

\*Sunlight dissipating the fog. A lighthouse on the shore.



# Painless SQL Initiation (even for scaredy-cats)

Important first step:

**Assure them they can't break it.**

Worst case scenarios:

- timing out the search
- a "can't perform" error

Anti-fear groundwork provides freedom to learn and play (and yes, fail).

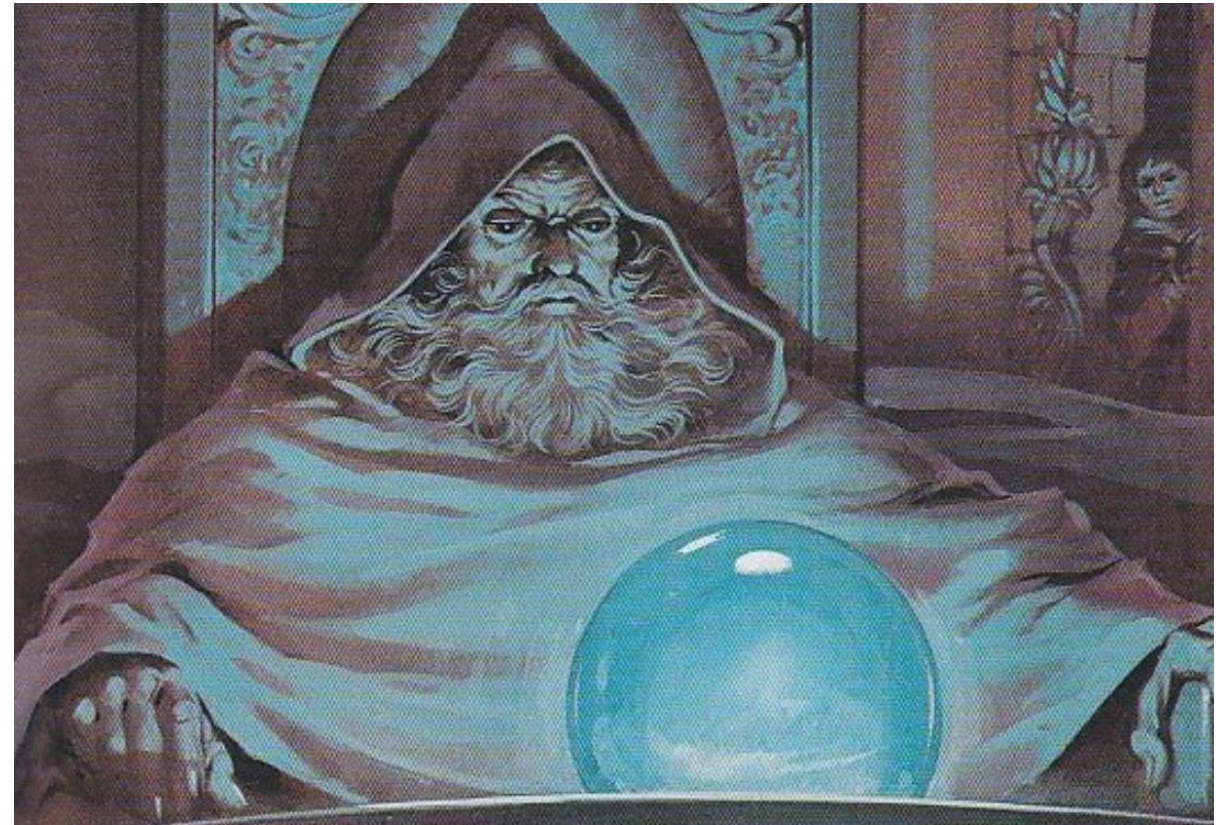




# Unreadable oracle or just another Polaris function?

Use what they know:

- ✓ Draw clear paths between SQL structure and Polaris.
- ✓ Familiar vocabulary
- ✓ Connections to records



Original artwork by illustrator Angus McBride for *Middle-Earth Quest: A Spy in Isengard*.  
Meme-ified 2021 by twitter user @thatsgoodweb with caption "pondering my orb"

# Indecipherable jargon, *exit stage left*

Spot the difference:

SQL is a standard query language that retrieves data from a relational database program like Polaris.

SQL is a computer language that gives you behind-the-scenes access to searchable Polaris data.

Pare down the basics, without condescension.

# Would you rather: SQL training edition

Print or digital? Trick question: yes

Support a variety of learning styles. A broad array of training materials and preparation includes :

- Presentation (slides or video)
- Handouts that accompany training
  - Printed slides, expanded guides, bullet points

Prepare for the aftermath:

- Files and links to resources available
- Clear path for follow-up questions

# Dryer than a desert?\* Not on your watch!

What's the point? Levity & design are *functional*:

1. Create opportunities for brains to stay engaged.
2. Provide additional pathways to understanding.
3. Slow down the complex information overload. 🐢

**Create your trainings like they're made by a real person, for real people.**

A stylized illustration of a desert landscape. The sky is a gradient of light blue. The ground is a solid tan color. On the left and right sides, there are green saguaro cacti with small white spines. In the bottom center, there is a small, brown, spotted lizard.

\*My apologies to deserts, wonderful ecosystems who do not deserve this smear campaign

# Themes, puns, and memes – oh my!

Fun != comedy routine

“Inviting” can mean many things:

Funny. Cute. Dramatic. Thematic.


*Your adjective here.*





# Fantasy/Game-adjacent: Trading Cards

## 'JOIN' COMMAND



Item Table		Bib Table	
Item ID	123456	<b>Bib ID</b>	<b>56789</b>
<b>Bib ID</b>	<b>56789</b>	PAC	Yes
Title	Best Book	Available	08/21/2021
Branch	Best Branch	YTD Circ	15

**Equip JOIN command to search from additional tables.**

*Cost to Conjure: Name the Key. Tables must share one related piece of info to be joined under your rule.*

*With JOIN, I become... the Master of Tables*

## SINGLE-USE TABLE LABELS

CircItem Records

Table 1	
xyz	1
abc	2
def	3

I dub thee ... "item"

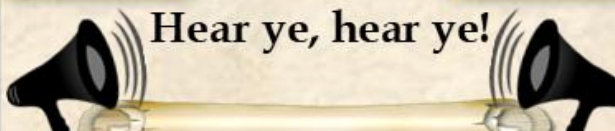
```
SELECT
  item.xyz
FROM
  CircItemRecords item
```

**Designate table nicknames in the query for efficiency & precision**

*Potential Pitfall: Identity Crisis. Assign unique nicknames to each table called upon. Reference the tables using this label each time throughout the query.*

*Mom only calls me BibliographicRecords if she's mad*

## 'WHERE' DECREE



Hear ye, hear ye!

Books with subject LIKE 'library' belong IN (these branches); verily, they were due BETWEEN Labor Day AND Staff Ed Day.

**Equip WHERE clauses to expand past limited requirements.**

*Punctuation Station: Singles & Pairs. Other than the equal sign, operating symbols nearly always get used in pairs.*

*Forsooth! I found the treasured results with this creed*

# More cohesive than NY fashion week

A little polish, no graphic design experience needed.

No theme ideas?

Build from an image.

No image?

Run with a color palette.



Psssst <https://color.adobe.com/create/color-wheel>

# Polaris Wizardry:

## SQL in the Find Tool

Let the sun set on basic

Presented by Suri Smith, Circulation Coordinator

LCPL Presentation Created in Canva

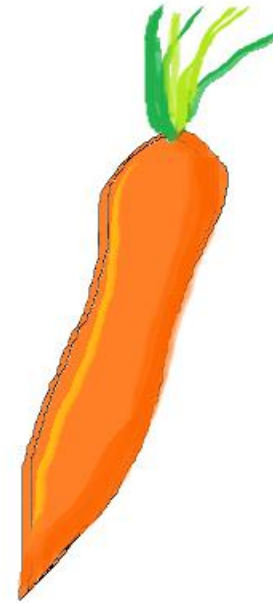


## Reel 'em in hook, line and sinker:

What does your audience care about?

Show them something like that early.

(Even if requires circling back to fully explain and unpack it later).



# The recipe book approach

Functional Find Tool SQL training is a balance.

- The plug-and-play
  - Immediately usable queries = help staff dive in
- The how-to manual
  - Understanding the why = equips staff with tools for creativity

Your library's recipe book is not the same as mine...

## A wizard reveals his *very specific* secrets

Or: creating custom in-house cheat sheets for your peeps

Each library is home to its own glowing hoard of Polaris IDs.

Provide relevant IDs needed to jump right into queries.

Bare Minimum:

- Circ statuses
- Relevant organization IDs
- Material types and/or collections



## Database Table Cheat Sheets

- Not the database help file!
- Abridged table guides to
  - CircItemRecords
  - ItemRecordDetails
  - ItemCheckouts
  - BibliographicRecords

# Accessible, Inviting, & Relevant

- Simplify concepts
- Make it familiar, rinse, repeat.
- Find your line of humor, theming, cuteness, color, etc.
- Know what staff care about.
- Build toward the complexity.
- Create/provide cheat sheet resources.

Okay, mist banishers. What's next?



# DEMOCRATIZE

## It's for the people

Yes, really

# NAYSAYING

Do any of these sound familiar? (Be honest)

**We have  
reports  
for that**

**Only of use to  
professional  
staff**

**Whoa, way  
too  
advanced**

**Does  
anyone  
even want  
to learn?**

**What if they  
break  
something?**

**Seriously?  
Who has  
time for  
that?**

# COUNTERPOINT

It's fun, dangit!

See also: "I paid for the whole speedometer; I'm going to use the whole speedometer" but it's your ILS

Do you need a more professional See Also?

 **Staff Development** 



# Democratize and demystify go hand-in-hand

You are trusting your staff.  
They are rising to the challenge.  
Everyone wins.



# Anti “Reinvent the Wheel” Brigade

Use available resources and training inspiration.

- Prev IUG Find Tool SQL slides
- IUG Forums
- Polaris Supportal Forums
- Discord
- ...steal my stuff!



# Go forth, SQL Influencers





# THANK YOU

## Questions?

(Past Suri offers her apologies to present company for  
definitely not leaving time for questions)

[ssmith@lex.lib.sc.us](mailto:ssmith@lex.lib.sc.us)