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Oddball ASCII Export Options

TOM MARCELLUS

If your database information has ever had a life outside of Q&A, chances are you've used Q&A's built-in export facilities.

To call these facilities "excellent" would be an overstatement. True, Q&A does offer a variety of export formats, though some of them—DIF, dBase II, and Paradox 2.0/3x, to name a few—are a bit long in the tooth. Many of us would be a lot happier if we could replace these with ready-made export options for more modern programs such as Quicken, Excel and perhaps even "Word merge file."

But on the other hand you've got tools in Q&A that enable you to create virtually any data export format you could need. And that's what I'm here to tell you about. I'm not going to dwell on how to export data in the usual way—you need only open your *Q&A Users Guide* to find out how to do that. Rather, I'll focus on *custom* export formats—taking advantage of Q&A's features to create export files that can satisfy the import file requirements of virtually any program, no matter how oddball those requirements might be.

Along the way, I'll briefly cover some of Q&A's most often used export options, but only with regard to what's wrong about them and when you should be prepared to compensate for them or avoid them altogether. First, let's look at some of the *non*-export-related tools you have in Q&A that can help you get the kind of custom export files you might need. Most of what I'll cover applies to Q&A for Windows as well as Q&A for DOS, as the export options are quite similar in both editions. But I'll use Q&A for DOS for my examples.

Tweaking export files in Write

Q&A's *Standard ASCII* export file format (File / Utilities / Export Data in Q&A DOS, File / Export in Q&A Win) gives you options that can satisfy the import file format requirements of most of today's programs. If a program can import data at all, it will usually accept what's variously known as *txt* (text), *csv* (comma separated values) or *asc* (ASCII) files. A typical Standard ASCII file produced by Q&A is comprised of one row for each exported database record, with the field values in quote marks and separated by commas, like this:

```
"Bill","Jones","244 Fairview","Costa Mesa","CA","92627"
```

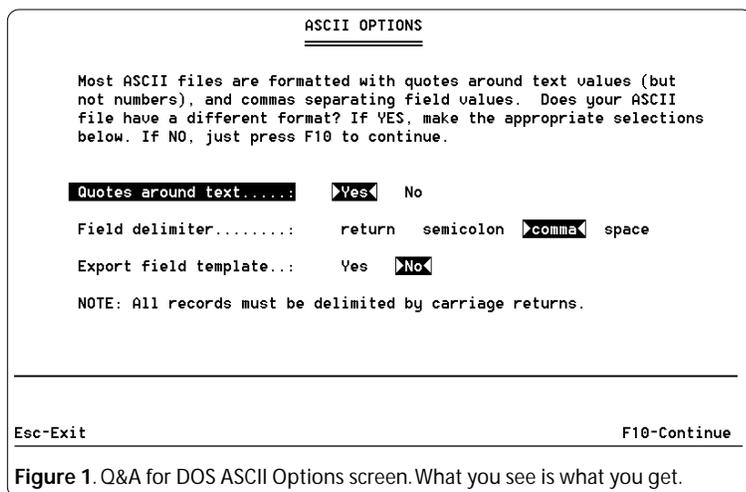


Figure 1. Q&A for DOS ASCII Options screen. What you see is what you get.

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But there are a few potential pitfalls you need to be aware of when exporting from Q&A to this format:

Q&A Standard ASCII exports numbers and money values with no quotes around them

Apparently, Q&A's designers figured that quotes weren't needed around these types of values because they couldn't possibly contain commas or any other permitted field delimiter character (return, semicolon, comma or space, and also tab in Q&A Win). And it is true that Q&A will *import* such a file into one of its own databases without a hitch. But a

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'Sesame' to Bring New Power to Retrieve and Restrict Specs

As of July, progress on Sesame development continues apace. In this latest update, we'll tell you about a few newly expanded features that will add substantially to Sesame's functionality and ease of use.

First of all, searching records in Sesame just got a whole lot better. We took Q&A users' suggestions (and pleas) to heart and have incorporated some significant improvements in Sesame's search capabilities.

How many times have you wished that you could do a little more with Q&A searches? For example, Q&A makes it very difficult to combine multiple "ands" and "ors" in a search. Just try and find all your customers in Florida or Pennsylvania, but of those in Pennsylvania, only those who live in Allegheny County and of those in Florida, only those who have responded to your mailings in the last 90 days. Usually, this would mean printing out several reports then cutting and pasting them together. You could never work with such a set of records live in the database.

Here's another example. How would you go about retrieving all your customers within a 50 mile radius, excluding the ones who are personal friends? (No field in the records for this.) Or what about performing a complex retrieve, then seeing the need to add a completely different set of records to that group so you wind up with the exact record set you really need?

These kinds of searches have been a nightmare for Q&A users. Sesame users will find them a walk in the park because we've incorporated the following new retrieval features into the product:

- All normal and advanced Q&A search capabilities.
- The ability to *Add to Current Results*. Multiple searches added together.
- *Search Within Current Results*. The ability to perform "drill-down" searches.
- *Inverted Search*. Instantaneous retrieval of records that did not meet the current search.
- The ability to *Remove From Current Results* any one or more records (just because you want to).

We think you'll find these enhanced search features not just useful, but truly exciting. They'll make working with Sesame data a breeze.

Restrict Spec Enhancements

Next, you database developers will want to know a little about how Sesame's design enhances the capabilities of the Restrict Spec.

If you're familiar with Q&A's Restrict Spec, you know that it lets the database developer or administrator control what users can enter in fields. Through Q&A 4.0, the developer can simply put a list of the allowable entries in the Restrict Spec for a field, and Q&A will flash a warning message if the user types a value in the field that doesn't meet the restriction. One problem, though, is that without pressing F7, the user has no idea what those restrictions are.

Additionally, like other kinds of Q&A field formatting, this control is loosely enforced. In other words, an improper value in a field can be accepted by Q&A if the user simply presses Enter to continue.

With Q&A 5.0's Usersselect command, the clever developer can create pseudo restrict lists and keep the user in the field if they do not select an entry from the list.

Sesame goes all of this at least one better. It has a simple built-in ability to let the developer define a field as a drop-down list of permitted values that appears on entering the field. Of course, we've



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fussier program that requires a *strict* import file structure (quotes around every value regardless of its type) might choke on such a file or—worse—mangle the import while leading you to believe that it sucked the file in just fine.

Beyond that, if you're relying on some programming routine to locate and separate the values in such a file based on finding occurrences of quote-comma-quote, it'll go bust if the file contains number or money values not surrounded by quotes.

Q&A removes any hard carriage returns in a field exported to Standard ASCII

This might or might not be desirable. If your database contains one or more fields with lengthy text values that have been formatted with hard carriage returns (such as dated notes on follow-up calls), and you export that field, Q&A will remove the line breaks and you'll wind up with a sloppy "running narrative" interspersed with double spaces or strings of spaces. This makes sense in that Q&A always uses a carriage return as the end-of-record delimiter. But isn't it interesting, then, that you can also select a carriage return as a *field* delimiter? If you do, each exported field will print in the export file on its own line, followed by *two* carriage returns at the end of each record. (John Dow's DTFDATA has an option that extracts Q&A data to a file and inserts a placeholder character for any carriage returns found, on the assumption that you'll be able to turn those placeholders back into carriage returns in the target program.)

Blank (empty) fields in a Q&A database, if exported to a "quotes-around-values" Standard ASCII file, will wind up in the export file as quote-space-quote (or semicolon-space-semicolon, if you're using a semicolon with or without quotes as your field delimiter)

Many programs out there—Microsoft Word, to name one—treat such "space-only" values not as empty, but as fields containing a space character. You'll get weird results in Word if you use a file like this as a data source for a mail merge. If a "space-only" merge field is on a line by itself in a particular document—say a second address line that could be "empty" in some letters—Word will print an unsightly blank line in that document rather than closing up the space as it would if the field were truly blank.

Now, if an otherwise empty Q&A database field contains a space, Q&A evidently strips it out or at least suppresses it for its own operations (except when exporting the field!). And if you actually type one or more spaces before or after a field value, Q&A will automatically "trim" the value, removing them when you save the record.

This is not the case with other programs. Imagine you have a programming routine in another program that checks whether a field is empty or not. You *know* it's

empty because you can see there's nothing in it. But the programming keeps behaving as though it *isn't* empty. Well, if the data in that program came from a Q&A-spawned Standard ASCII export file, the field probably contains a space character.

I ran into this in HTML (Web) forms that got partially auto-filled from what started out as a Q&A Standard ASCII export file. I used a Javascript routine to check to make sure that certain fields in the form weren't empty before allowing the form to be submitted. The fields were visibly empty but the routine wasn't trapping them. Then I put the cursor in one of them and discovered that it would shift to the left a bit when I pressed the backspace key. Try this in an "empty" Q&A field and you'll see the same thing, except that to Q&A an "empty" field that contains a space is still "empty"—except, as I said, when Q&A exports it to Standard ASCII. (DTFDATA's "Q&A Format" option, by the way, removes such spaces.)

Q&A's Standard ASCII export options confine you to a narrow range of field delimiter characters (return, comma, semicolon, or space) and insist on a carriage return by itself as the record delimiter

Q&A won't let you specify an optional field delimiter character such as the carat ("^") or pipe ("|"), and won't let you write selected *portions* of each exported record to consecutive lines in an export file. This is why you can't, in one step, create an export file in Q&A that will accommodate Quicken's "QIF" file format. (See "How to Pass Data to Quicken" in the June 1993 issue and "Exporting Data to Quicken" in the May 1998 issue.) Although Q&A 5.0 includes an option to *import* a Quicken file, it offers none to *export* data to Quicken.

To compensate for situations where blank fields are exported as a hard space and where you need a field delimiter character other than what Q&A offers, you can use the Write word processor to put the export file into a useable format. That is, if the file is small enough to be displayed in Write (up to about 50K depending on available memory).

For example, if you need the fields in your export file separated by a carat ("^") character, you can choose, say, the semicolon as your field delimiter, run the export, then display the resulting ASCII file in Write. There you can do a *Fast Automatic* Search and Replace (F7), searching for semicolons, replacing each one with the character of your choice, then resaving the file to ASCII format by pressing Ctrl-F8. (A macro can easily do all this for you—including running the original export.)

Just remember that if, in this case, the *contents* of any exported field contains a semicolon, you'll wind up with a botched export file.

You can use the same technique to handle the space-between-two-delimiters problem. Just dump the file into Write, search for quote-space-quote (or semicolon-space-semicolon) and replace with quote-quote (or semicolon-semicolon).

Of course, you can do this Search/Replace thing in Microsoft Word or most any word processor just as well—and it won't matter how large the file is. Just remember to save the modified file back to plain DOS text (ASCII) format.

This is about the extent to which you can easily use Write to “clean up” an export file. I've known people to spend agonized hours trying to get Q&A Write to replace this, that and the other thing with that, this and something else. When they finally get there, they can't remember how they got there and so can't write a macro that'll do it for them the next time. There are less arduous and safer ways to get a good custom export file, as you'll see.

dBase and Fixed ASCII export

I shouldn't leave this discussion without a brief mention of Q&A's export to dBase and Fixed ASCII options.

Exporting to dBase can have certain advantages. Many programs, including Q&A and MS Office products, will import a dBase file without requiring a separate header file of field names (or in the case of Access, a predesigned table) to link the data with its corresponding fields.

When you export to dBase, Q&A creates a dBase-compatible file containing the data *and* the field names (in contrast to an ASCII export file that contains no field names, just field delimiters and data).

Two things to be aware of when exporting to dBase, though:

- **Field Names**—Q&A will truncate any field names longer than 10 characters and replace spaces with underscore characters.
- **Data**—Q&A will truncate any data value that exceeds 250 characters. This second gotcha always catches people by surprise. (“What did Q&A do with the rest of my data?!”) But it's a dBase, not Q&A, limitation.

Fixed ASCII (aka “Table ASCII”) is often the required import format of “old dog” mainframe applications. This is where, for each data field in the export file, you must specify the starting column position as well as the maximum length of the value, so you'll wind up a table-like export file format like this:

Jones	William	14322 West Main St.
Sheffield	Janice	232 Andover Ave.

If you ever need to export to Fixed ASCII, keep in mind that Q&A will truncate any values that exceed the maximum specified length for a field. For example, if you put **1,10** in a field at Q&A's Merge Spec (meaning that the data value should start at column **1** and be **up to 10** characters long)—and if the value is “Morgenstern”—you'll get “Morgenster” in the export file.

When using Fixed ASCII, remember that the starting

position for the *next* field's column must be a number that's higher than the maximum value length for the *preceding* column plus that preceding column's starting position. People find this confusing. I used to. If you've specified a field to start at column 30 and contain a maximum of 20 characters (**30,20** in the field at the Merge Spec), then you must start the next column at a column position no lower than 50.

A Q&A Report-generated export file

You can generate a pretty darned sophisticated export file using a Q&A report. *Really*—as long as you're cognizant of the limitations.

Suppose you need to create an export file where the name, address, city, state and zip need to be separated by a certain delimiter (say, a comma), but each of the name parts (Mr.^James^Dean) needs to be separated by a *different* delimiter. (You can laugh, but I've seen this requirement—and where else but a government agency?) You can do this in one step with a properly designed Q&A report.

Consider this Column/Sort Spec for a report:

```
Salutation: 1,I
FirstName: 2,I
LastName: 3,I
Street: 4,I
City: 5,I
State: 6,I
Zip: 7,I
```

Notice that all the fields are invisible. Now check out the following Derived Column Spec:

```
Heading: Format Name Parts
Formula No. 1 Salutation + "^" + FirstName + "^"
              + LastName
Column/Sort Spec: 10,I

Heading: \ \
Formula No. 2 #10 + "," + #4 + "," + #5 + ","
              + #6 + "," + @Str(#7)
Column/Sort Spec: 11,HS(\ )
```

Here, the first derived column assembles the name parts, separating each with the “^” character. (I've used field names on the Formula line just to show that you *can* use them here.) The second derived column prints the line, separating each value with a comma. The “\ \” (backslash-space-backslash) on the Heading line prints a blank heading, and the HS(\) code on the Column/Sort Spec line eliminates the heading separator line. I put the numeric-looking Zip Code inside the @Str function to force Q&A to treat it as text. Otherwise, only the Zip Code would print.

When you print this report to DISK (an ASCII file), the data will begin on line 3 because the column heading and separator lines are spaces. Most programs when importing a file like this will ignore the first two “blank” lines and begin picking up the data on line 3. If not, you can always dump the file into Write and delete the first two lines.

A few tips and caveats on generating an export file in Q&A Report:

- Using a report to generate an export file allows you to customize the output file and even perform @XLookups to other databases. So you can create export files containing data from more than one database.
- At the Define Page screen, set a large page width and right margin (240 for both, for example), and set your top, right and bottom margins to 0 (zero). You want printing to begin at the extreme left with the longest possible line length.
- Also at the Define Page screen, set your page length to a value that's greater than the number of records that will wind up in the export file. This way you'll ensure there are no page breaks (blank lines) in the middle of the file.
- In the output file, very long lines may be wrapped (with a hard carriage return) by Q&A where a space occurs. I haven't been able to find any logic in why or where this occurs, and setting an ever wider page width and right margin didn't help. So this technique is for exporting a relatively small group of fields that don't contain terribly lengthy values.
- In your Derived Column formula that actually prints the line, remember to place any value that Q&A might consider numeric (such as dates, money, numbers, Zip Codes, and the like) inside the @Str function to force Q&A to treat them as text. You can optionally create earlier Derived Columns to preformat such values. For example, a date like August 12, 2001 will appear in the export file as 2001/08/12—a format that the target program might not accommodate. You can put this in an 08-12-2001 format using a Derived Column formula like the following, which assumes that the date value is in invisible column 5:

```
@Mid(#5, 6, 2) + "-" + @Right(#5,2) + "-"  
+ @Left(#5, 4)
```

For those *really* oddball requirements

One of these days you might be confronted by an export file format requirement that's so wild and wooly that you can't begin to imagine how you'd ever get Q&A to produce such a thing. That's when you'll have to enlist the data manipulation power of a supplementary database and call on a macro to run the export procedure for you.

I'll show you an example that's based on an actual requirement I had. First, a little about the scenario.

A CHECKS.DTF database contained a record for each contribution received, with fields for the contributor's unique ID number, whole name, check amount, the date the check was received, the pertinent election year, and a field that indicated whether the contribution was for a Primary or General election (P or G).

A separate ADDRESS.DTF database contained a detail record for each contributor, including fields for the contributor ID, first name, last name, address, employer, occupation, and the like.

The export file had to be based primarily on the CHECKS database because each check received during the reporting period had to be listed as a separate record. But clearly some of the data would have to come from the ADDRESS file. For example, for checks over \$200.00, the contributor's full address, employer and occupation had to be listed; for smaller contributions, they did not.

It got worse. The field delimiter required by the target program's data import option was a comma, so any commas in any of the exported values would have to be replaced with a space. (For example, employer "Magnum Industries, Inc." changed to "Magnum Industries Inc.")

Then a Curve Ball. Although the import file had to be comma-delimited, the name parts had to be separated by the "^" character (James^Johnson) and the two fields, **Primary/General** and **Election Year** had to be combined into a single value ("P2002," for example).

These various import file requirements made a supplementary database the only way I knew of to generate such a file. Below are the 17 fields in that database (SUPP.DTF). Each one corresponds to its counterpart in the target program's import file structure and the fields are in the same order as required by it.

The field values shown in ***bold-italic*** here are filled from data in CHECK database. The others are filled and, in some cases, reformatted by a Mass Update, as you'll see:

```
      ID: 120  
Form Type: SA11A1  
  Filer:  
Entity Type: IND  
   Name: Barringer^Reginald  
Street1: 446 West Anaheim Road  
Street2: Suite 344  
   City: Anaheim  
   State: CA  
   Zip: 92807-4241  
Election Code: P2002  
Election Year: 2002  
Election Other:  
   Employer: Peabody Fletcher Inc.  
Occupation: Investor  
Date Received: 20010617  
   Amount: 1000.00
```

ID is the Contributor's ID—the key value that links the CHECK records to the ADDRESS records. The ID wasn't required in the export file but was needed to lookup the contributor's information in the ADDRESS database. **Form Type** and **Entity Type** were fixed values, while **Filer** and **Election Other** had to remain blank (for future use, I suppose) but still be represented by a placeholder in the export file. The rest of the fields should be self-explanatory from my earlier discussion.

Now I'll describe how all these fields get automatically filled.

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Installing Q&A from Diskettes

I can't seem to install Q&A on my new computer using my original Q&A program diskettes. I keep getting error messages or the system wants to reboot and then Windows locks up. What am I doing wrong?

Chris

Since installation can present a problem on newer machines and operating systems with almost any version of Q&A, let's answer this in three parts, (1) Q&A 4.0 DOS, (2) Q&A 5.0 DOS, and (3) Q&A 4.0 for Windows.

(1) With Q&A 4.0 for DOS the problem is pretty straightforward. As supplied by Symantec, the installation diskettes will *not* address or install to a hard drive partition larger than 2G. You will receive a "divide error" message. This means that the install program cannot read the space available on the hard drive. The fix is to either (a) partition the drive and install Q&A into the partition that's smaller than 2G, or (b) copy the folders and files from an another machine across a network (make sure to run Q&A with *Lesspace*), or (c) get a replacement CD from PCTA and just run the install program. Even though Q&A 4.0 for DOS will *run* in large hard drives, its install program won't recognize them.

(2) In Q&A 5.0 for DOS the issue is a little different. Q&A 5.0 *will* install from floppies to a large hard drive (but won't run safely without *Lesspace*), but has to be installed with a different command if it's being installed in Windows 9x, NT, or 2000. You must use the command "*installd*" rather than just "install". This tells Q&A 5.0 that it is being installed on a newer Windows machine and not to try re-booting the system prior to installation. As an option, Q&A software supplied by PCTA or Keyword Training takes care of this and allows you to install Q&A 5.0 anywhere with a single click.

(3) As for Q&A for Windows—the version that comes on floppies—it always wants to reboot your PC and write some start-up installation files. On some modern Windows computers, this won't work. You may get messages that certain startup files could not successfully

be written. If you have Q&A for Windows on another networked computer, you can copy the entire folder, create a new shortcut, and you're in business. If not, the best suggestion is to get the replacement CD from PCTA or the full CD from Keyword Training and install it from the CD instead of trying to use the original floppies. Remember, if you've installed Q&A for Windows in Windows NT or 2000, you need to go to www.johntndow.com and download then install the *NTFIX* patch before you can successfully run the program.

Can Q&A Get/Send Data through Serial Ports?

Our company has been hired to hook up a Bar Code system to an existing Q&A database system. I'm looking for any information concerning sending and receiving data to and from Q&A using the Com1-Com4 serial ports. Basically, we need to send the data out from Q&A to a Bar code printer as well as receive data from a time clock unit. There will also be two other units that may require the use of an I/O expansion board. Is it possible for Q&A to send and receive data through a serial connection?

Logan

In this case, I'm afraid that the answer is "No," Q&A cannot take data in through a serial connection. However, there are any number of bar-code reader systems that can either port their data in through a "keyboard wedge" or export their data to comma delimited ASCII files. Either of these options will allow "automated" entry into Q&A databases. The wedge acts just like a person typing in the data at the keyboard and can even be programmed to supply a carriage return or F10 at the end of each input. The ASCII file can be imported using a Macro driven routine and Q&A's file import features. As to the time clock system, you will have to see if the data can be exported to ASCII and use that approach.

Skipping Lines (or not) in Q&A Reports

We've just installed (reinstalled) Q&A for DOS on a new machine. In all of our reports we now get double-spacing where we used to get single spacing. We have not made any



Stumped?

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Q&A version number (and whether DOS or Windows) and a detailed description of the problem. We'll publish those questions we feel are of general reader interest; individual responses aren't possible.

changes to our databases from when they were on the old machine. Now, every time the date changes there is a blank line in the report. We always used to get no line breaks. What gives?

Cindy

Q&A is still acting like it should. The issue is that Q&A's default is to skip a line on each column break in a report. In your old installation, someone had to have had to change the default settings for the database to *not* skip a line. You have obviously printed your reports by selecting *Design/Redesign a Report* rather than *Print a Report* from the Q&A Report menus. Doing it this way, Q&A treats the report as a new one and takes on the default settings from your newly installed copy of Q&A. What you have to do is select *Report / Set Global Options / Columnar Global Options / Set format Options*, then change the third item to *Don't Skip Line*. That should solve your problem after you go into *Design/Redesign a Report* one more time. Another way to stop Q&A from skipping lines is to add a ",CS" after the "AS" in the report's Column/Sort spec. This tells Q&A to cancel subcalculations and to not treat the break as a break on a sorted value. Be aware, though, that any calculations such as totals and counts won't be triggered by the sort. Your solution may really involve a combination of the two techniques. Also remember that the revised global settings will only be applied to any *new* or *redesigned* reports.

Q&A DOS Documents to MS Word Format

I have several Q&A for DOS document files that I would like to convert to Microsoft Word. Having the documents in Q&A makes editing and formatting them difficult. When I try to export the documents using Q&A's menus, I get unusable output. Is there anything I can do?

Leo

What you are experiencing is the way Microsoft keeps changing their file formats and the problem it causes for other software. Q&A can export any of its documents to ASCII, WordPerfect or Microsoft Word 3, 4, or 5. The problem is that Word 97, 2000, or XP doesn't properly recognize the converted MS Word 5 (the preferred export) format. It has trash at the top and bottom of each document. You could export to ASCII and bring it into Word as a text file but then you are relegated to removing the carriage returns at the end of each line. The better way is to do the following:

First, in Q&A, remove any headers or footers (these will put "trash" onto every page of the converted documents. Next, export the document from the Q&A menu as a Microsoft Word 5.0 document and give it the extension '.doc'. Start Microsoft Word and tell it to open the new file. You will see 2 or 3 lines of "garbage" at the top of the document. Delete them. Then, press *Ctrl-End* to get to the end of the document. There you will find more

"garbage." While holding the *Shift* key down, scroll up until you find the real end of your document (it might be several pages up). With all of the bottom trash now highlighted, press *Delete*. You should be left with your original document. But, one more step. Even though Word opened the file as a Word document, it now wants to save it as a text file. Make sure to select *Save as* and select *Microsoft Word Document* as the type. There you have it. Q&A to Word in three steps.

Q&A and Windows O/S's Revisited

Until Lantica releases its new Q&A replacement product—a true 32-bit Windows program, I guess we will constantly be answering requests for a copy of "Q&A 5.0 for Windows"! I think it is worth the time and space to make certain things clear again. There is only one edition of Q&A that was designed exclusively for Windows—Q&A 4.0 for Windows, released in 1993. This is a 16-bit version designed specifically for Windows 3.x.

Almost all copies of Q&A DOS can be run in *any* version of Windows in a windowed environment. It is *never* necessary to boot to DOS to run Q&A. Now, let's do this one more time:

Q&A Version	Designed to Run In	O/S's Runs in *	Printers **
3.0 DOS	DOS	DOS, Win3x, 9x ¹	DOS Capable
4.0 DOS	DOS	DOS, Win3x, 9x, NT, 2000, Me	DOS Capable or existing Win drivers
4.0 Windows ²	Win3x	Win3x, 9x, Me, NT ³ , 2000 ³	Most Windows Printers
5.0 DOS	DOS	DOS, Win3x, 9x, NT, 2000, Me ⁴	DOS Capable or existing Win drivers

All Q&A versions must have all their database, document and temporary files in a 2G or smaller partition. For Q&A DOS 4.0, 5.0 and later 3.0 versions, you can instead use Michael Kennedy's *Lesspace* utility available at www.quickanswer.com in a trial version or at www.kennedysoftware.ie in the faster registered version.

Notes

* The Specified Version has significant history and expert experience of running in these O/S's. May run in others but we don't recommend it.

** Will print to these types of printers or others which can *emulate* listed printers

¹ Can only comfortably recommend Win95A. It may even be limited to 32M disk space in earliest versions.

² *Lesspace* cannot be run with a Windows program. Therefore, this Q&A is limited to physical or virtual disk partitions of less than 2G.

³ Requires John Dow's NTFIX patch available at www.johntdow.com

⁴ Windows Millenium Edition is fraught with problems and issues. With certain hardware, it makes Expanded Memory completely *unavailable*, thus effectively crippling Q&A 5.0 and making it a questionable operating system for this version.

Concludes bottom of next page

ASCII Export. . . cont'd from page 5

A Copy Selected Records operation, followed by a Mass Update and finally an export are all taken care of by a rather simple macro. Here are the steps it performs:

1. First, the macro removes all the records from SUPP.DTF in preparation for a new cycle. It's rigged not to bomb if the database is already empty.
2. It then runs a Copy Selected Records from CHECK.DTF to SUPP.DTF, pausing in the Retrieve Spec's **Date Received** field for the operator to type the date range for the filing, such as `>=1/1/2001..<=6/30/2001`.
3. At the Merge Spec, the macro loads a saved spec that specifies only five fields to copy to SUPP.DTF—**ID**, **Primary/General** (P or G), **Election Year**, **Date Received** and **Amount**. This spec tells Q&A which fields in the SUPP database are to receive the copied values. When this part of the process is done, the SUPP database contains one record for each copied CHECK record.
4. Now the SUPP database is Mass Updated with a program I'll show you in a moment.
5. Finally, all the SUPP database records are exported to a Standard ASCII file with a comma as the field delimiter, overwriting the existing file of the same name.

The operator now imports the file into the target program and the biggest part of the periodic filing requirement is done. The SUPP database still contains all the records from the current cycle, so they can be eyeballed if needed to spot any obvious discrepancies. Any corrections can be made to the CHECK or ADDRESS database and the 10-second process rerun to generate a corrected export file.

Here's the SUPP.DTF Mass Update program:

```
#1:
Form Type = "SAllA1";
Entity Type = "IND";
```

```
Name = @XLu("Address", ID, "ID #", "Last Name")
+ "^" + @XLu("Address", ID, "ID #", "First Name");
```

```
Name = @Replace(Name, ",", "");
Election Code = @Left(Election Code, 1) +
@Str(Election Year);
Date Received = @Replace(Date Received, "/", "");
```

```
If Amount > 200 Then
{
Street1 = @XLu("Address", ID, "ID #", "Address");
Street2 = @XLu("Address", ID, "ID #", "Suite");
City = @XLu("Address", ID, "ID #", "City");
State = @XLu("Address", ID, "ID #", "State");
Zip = @XLu("Address", ID, "ID #", "Zip");
Street1 = @Replace(Street1, ",", "");
```

```
Employer = @XLu("Address", ID, "ID #", "Employer");
Employer = @Replace(Employer, ",", "");
```

```
Occupation = @XLu("Address", ID, "ID #",
"Occupation");
Occupation = @Replace(Occupation, ",", "");
}
```

The name parts are separated by the “^” character. Any commas in the name, address, employer and occupation fields are replaced with spaces as the comma is the export file's field delimiter. The latter fields are filled only if the amount is over \$200. The date received (in a YYYY/MM/DD format because it's in a text field) needs the slashes removed, so they're replaced with nothing.

Here's the macro:

```
<begdef><altf><name>"<caps,>altf<caps.>"<vidon>fr
<capsf4><f10>supp<enter>s<f10>y<esc><esc><esc>fccheck
<enter>ssupp<enter><tab><tab><tab><tab><tab><tab><tab>
<tab><tab><tab><tab><tab><tab><f6><wait><enter><f6><f8>
<altf8>for<sp>fecfile<enter><f10><altf8>for<sp>
fecfile<enter><f10><esc>fmsupp<enter><f10><altf8>
for<sp>fecfile<enter><f10>n<esc>fuessupp<enter>
supp.txt<enter>y<f10><altf8>for<sp>fecfile<enter><f10>
<rgt><f10><esc><esc><esc><enddef>
```

As usual, Q&A gives you more than one way to skin your data. This is one of the reasons why you'll find “old hat” system administrators and MIS's in large and small companies everywhere who would kill before giving up their copy of Q&A for DOS.

Tom Marcellus is editor of *The Quick Answer*.

@Help. . . cont'd from page 7

Q&A for DOS and Windows 2000 Copy/Paste

I was reading your *Q&A DOS in Windows 2000* article and noticed this line: "...It will still take the menu Edit selection to paste it into Q&A...." Actually, you can simply right-click the mouse to paste into a DOS window that has been set to use *QuickEdit Mode*. You might have already discovered this since writing the article, but I thought I would let you know in case you hadn't.

Carl

Thanks for the tip—and you're correct. If you set the Windows 2000 Q&A Window to *QuickEdit* mode, not only will pasting work with a right-click, but so will marking (highlighting) and copying. Just left-click, hold, drag, then right-click to copy the selected text to the clipboard. There's one drawback, though. When you set the window to this mode, the mouse no longer works with Q&A's menus or in database fields. I guess in this case “you takes your pick and you pays the price.”

Bill Halpern is co-owner of Professional Computer Technology Associates (PCTA) in Newtown, Pennsylvania and is President and CEO of Lantica Software, LLC. 215-598-8440. bill@pcta-usa.com, www.pcta-usa.com.

Seeing is Believing— Formview for Q&A Win

JOHN T. DOW



Q&A for DOS is a uniquely easy database to use. I have my own theory on why that is. Let's take a real world example. Let's say you have a Q&A for Windows database named ORDER. Things don't look quite right on the data entry form and you wonder if some of the fields on the form have different format options. With Q&A for DOS you can do File / Design / Customize / Format Values. You would then see at a glance which fields have the same format and which have different formats. Immediately you've answered the question.

With Q&A for Windows and other databases, you simply don't have the elegant menu choices provided by Q&A for DOS. You can't see the formats of these fields laid out on the data entry form. To compare the formats for the fields on the form, you have to go through several steps and (shudder) you have to think. You have to look things up and remember them so you can compare them mentally.

Your visual system is an extremely powerful pattern recognition tool. Q&A for DOS lets you use this tool. Other databases don't.

Your eyes can see patterns in the Q&A for DOS format display and you will actually see if the formats look the same or different. If your eyes tell you there's a difference, you can focus in on it and only then do you need to see what the actual difference is and think about it.

Seeing is easier than thinking. With Q&A for DOS, you can see things. With other databases, you have to think. That's why I believe Q&A for DOS is easier to use.

The wrong way of doing things

Now let's take Q&A for Windows as an example of doing it the wrong way.

With Q&A for Windows, to see the field formats you have to do a Select / Database Structure. At that point a table appears that contains all the fields in the database, not just the ones you need to check. You have to locate your fields in the table. When you find a field, its format is easy to see. But you can't see them all at once, so your eye can't compare them.

Furthermore, just finding them is awkward. You need to know their names or Program ID numbers and then you have to find them one at a time in the table. If you've named or numbered them well, some of them might sort together in the table. While Q&A for Windows allows you

to sort the table in several ways, it just isn't as simple as seeing the field formats on the data entry form the way you can with Q&A for DOS.

Hope for the future

It is the intention of the designers of "Sesame" (myself included) that Sesame will be as much like Q&A for DOS as possible in this regard and not like Q&A for Windows and all the other databases that make you think.

A quick fix

By adding a new option to DTFSPESCS and writing the FORMVIEW.BAT file, I have created a quick fix for the problem. It's not perfect but it's very helpful. It fulfills the goal of letting you see rather think.

With this fix, just like Q&A for DOS, you can now see the Format Specs on the actual data entry form. You can also see several other critically important specs in the same easy way. (See Figure 1.)

This is the information you can see in the new form view:

- Field names
- Programming Field ID numbers
- Programming statements
- Speedy (indexed) fields
- Read only fields
- Initial value fields
- Restrict value fields
- Field templates
- DOS position (page, row, column)

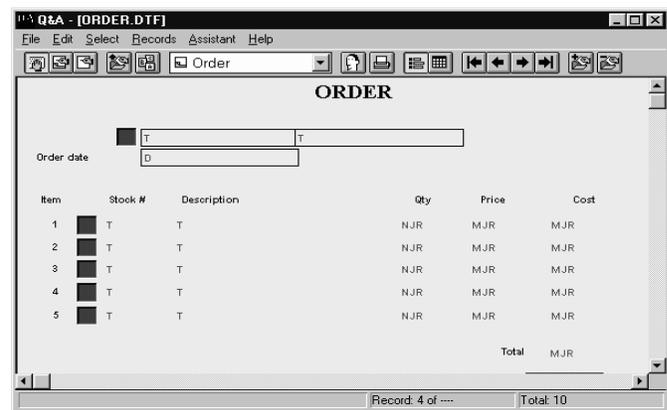


Figure1. FormView of ORDER database showing Format specs

The programming information is displayed in two views. One view shows just the program numbers (field ID values according to Q&A for Windows). The other shows the actual programming statements.

Using it is easy

All you need to do is type:

```
FORMVIEW ORDER
```

You can set up a shortcut or work from the DOS prompt. A new database, ORDER.DTF, will suddenly appear in the FORMVIEW subdirectory. There will be 10 data records in this new database that contain the information listed above. You can view the information by pressing F10 and F9, or by clicking on the arrows on the Q&A Windows tool bar.

Not only is FORMVIEW simple, it's also fast. You could easily put an icon on your desktop to refresh the form view for the ORDER database with a single click. Any time you've made some changes to the real ORDER database, just click. In a few seconds you have a refreshed form view ORDER database.

The creation of this new form view database is entirely automatic. The batch file FORMVIEW.BAT calls DTF SPECS and Q&A for DOS to do the actual work. The FORMVIEW subdirectory is created if there isn't one already. The specs are extracted from the original ORDER database. The ORDER database design is copied and certain changes are made to facilitate the database's role as the form view version of the actual ORDER database. (For example, the programming is removed from the copy because you don't want your actual programming to kick in when you're viewing the Format

or Program Specs.) Finally, the specs are loaded into the form view version of the ORDER database.

Installation

You need two programs.

FORMVIEW relies on DTF SPECS to extract the data and to do a couple of other things that make the process automatic. Therefore you need DTF SPECS version 2.56 or higher. If you have version 2.50 or higher, this is a free upgrade. Send me e-mail to receive the upgrade.

You also need to have Q&A for DOS installed because it is used to copy the design and make the desired changes to the form view copy of the database.

John Dow is the creator of a host of valuable Q&A utilities, including DTFDATA, DTFDOCTR and DTFWIN, and he developed the patch that enables Q&A for Windows to run in Windows 2000. He is also a principal of Lantica Software, LLC. www.johntdow.com, 412-973-9473.



Figure2. FormView of ORDER database showing Programming specs.

Sesame Seeds 'Sesame' Beta and Release Update

We've been inundated with calls and emails from all of you who are eagerly awaiting the release of 'Sesame'. At the January Q&A Users Conference, we told you that we were projecting a 3rd quarter release with the beta testing this summer.

Summer is here. What is the status? When can you get a copy of the program? This is the gist of most of your inquiries.

Here is the answer. As of now, we are planning a beta release this fall and final product this winter. The product is shaping up to be even more than we expected to be able to provide to you. But, as with any software development, it has sometimes taken longer than expected to build in the powerful features yet retain the user-friendliness we all demand.

As you have been able to see at www.lantica.com, Sesame development has proceeded exceptionally well and we have

incorporated many more features than those we discussed at the conference. These are in direct response to your requests and suggestions. We have added much better searching capability, better field restrictions, additional field type support (list boxes, Boolean fields, picture fields, and the like), better Q&A import capability, and much, much more that we have not yet publicly released. To keep as close as possible to our original schedule, no more new features will be added to the first release. We know that you will be excited when you see all that is in the package.

We have delayed the release given our desire to add the features you've requested, coupled with our priority on delivering a stable product. Our philosophy is to do it right rather than over and over! We have the people and financial assets in place to bring you a superior product. I know that it will be worth your wait.

Bill Halpern, President/CEO, Lantica Software, LLC

Sesame Seeds... cont'd from page 2

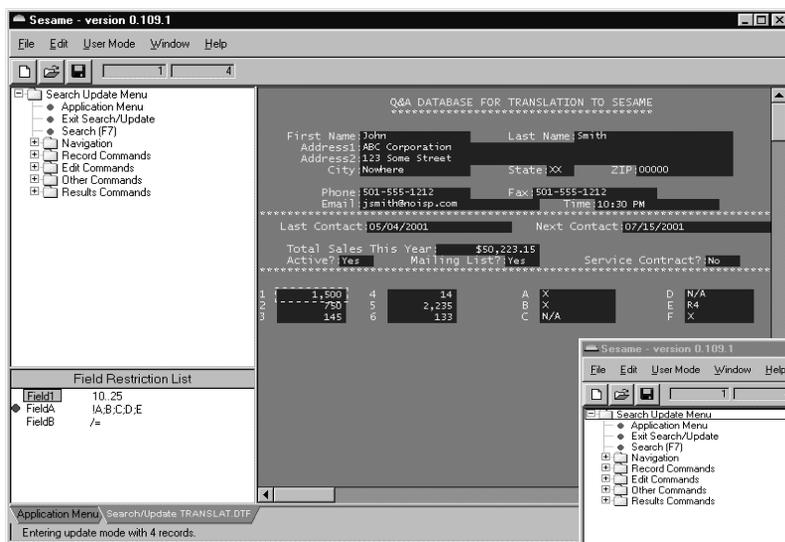
retained the Restrict Spec—but with some twists for the better. If a field has a restriction placed on its data, the user will see such restrictions in a window on the lower left-hand side of the screen during data entry.

We've also taken the position that if the developer or administrator has placed a restriction on the data, it's a restriction. Sesame won't allow it to be overridden.

What's more, Sesame can be used to check and display, during Search/Update mode, any fields that do not meet the proper restrictions. Try that with Q&A! In Q&A, unless you change the value in a field, no warning flag appears.

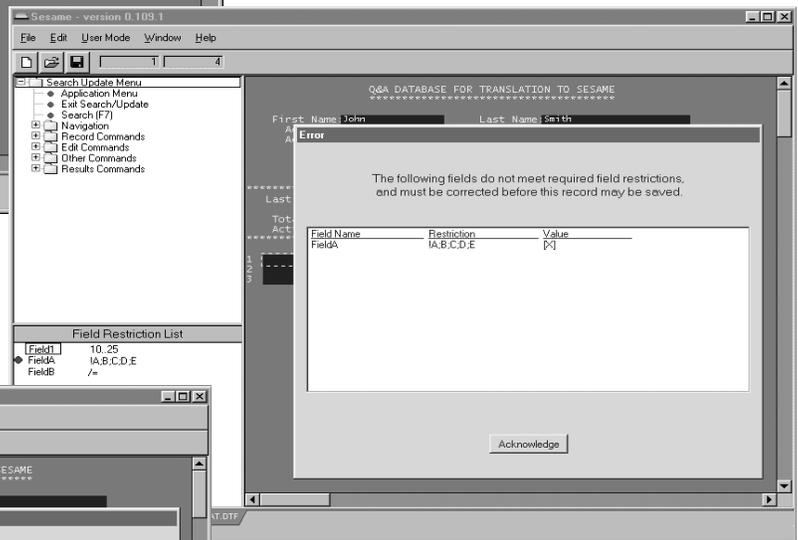
But we feel that even this isn't enough. Remember, we promised ease of use. One of the things that makes software easy to use is consistency. Mindful of this, we do not, for example, want the programming language to differ between, say, the form, the report module, and the Retrieve Spec. In the same vein, if you can enter a value in the Retrieve Spec, in Sesame you can use that same value in the Restrict Spec. Imagine being able to place "Fl.." as a Restrict Spec restriction on a field, and having the user be able to enter "Fl" or "Florida" or "Floral" with Sesame accepting any of these! Of course, all the Q&A standard Restrict Specs still work in Sesame.

Take a look at the screen shots below and you'll have a good idea of how all this works.

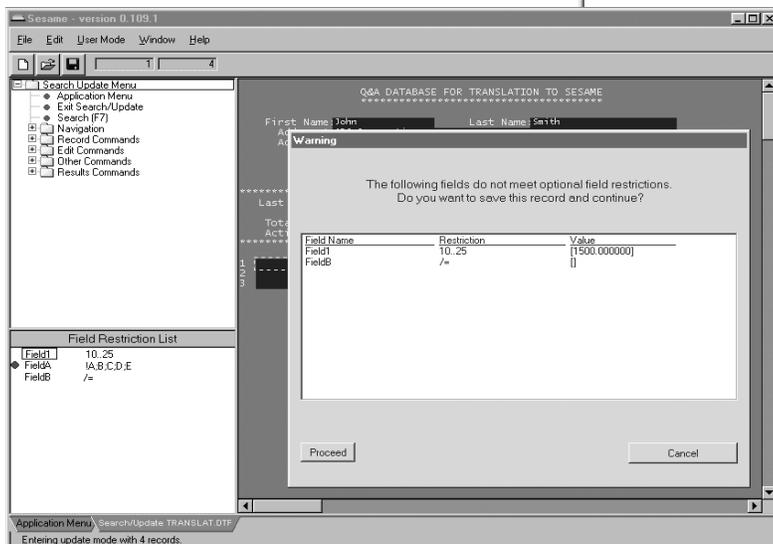


Left: Field Restriction list displayed in lower left corner of screen.

Right: Sesame advises if any field doesn't meet *required* (inviolable) restrictions.



Left: Sesame advises on *optional* field restrictions and allows them to be overridden.

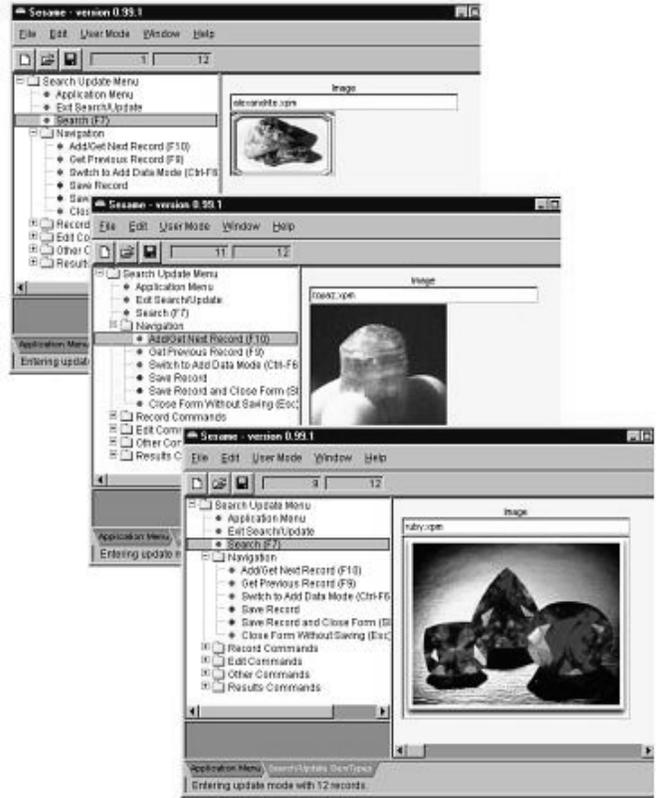




Searchable Pictures in Your Databases

The 'Sesame' development team is moving ahead and making major progress in the product development cycle. We have been adding new features that will make 'Sesame' a standout product. We can now support in the database not only the picture fields that we demonstrated at the International Q&A Users Conference in January, but we have even come up with a way to make them *searchable*.

Sesame saves pictures in a database by storing the name of the file in the record then displaying the picture when the linked record is displayed. (See graphic on the right.) This means that if you name your picture files appropriately, like ruby-red.xxx ("xxx" being the image file format of your choice), ruby-large.xxx and ruby-small.xxx, you will then be able to search for all records with pictures of rubies simply by typing "ruby.." in the picture field at the Retrieve Spec. Think about the value of this capability when it comes to pictures of members, products or employees. The possibilities are endless!



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First Class