Sorting your Database by Cindy O'Hora

Sorting in database allows you set a priority in how the list is displayed to you. You might want your address book to be in alphabetical order. Or in my school cd database, I might want to cluster all the titles by subject area. When I sort it by the subject field, it will list together all the math, then all the science, and so on.

Sort is the feature which makes it possible to keep your address book alphabetical even when you add people later.
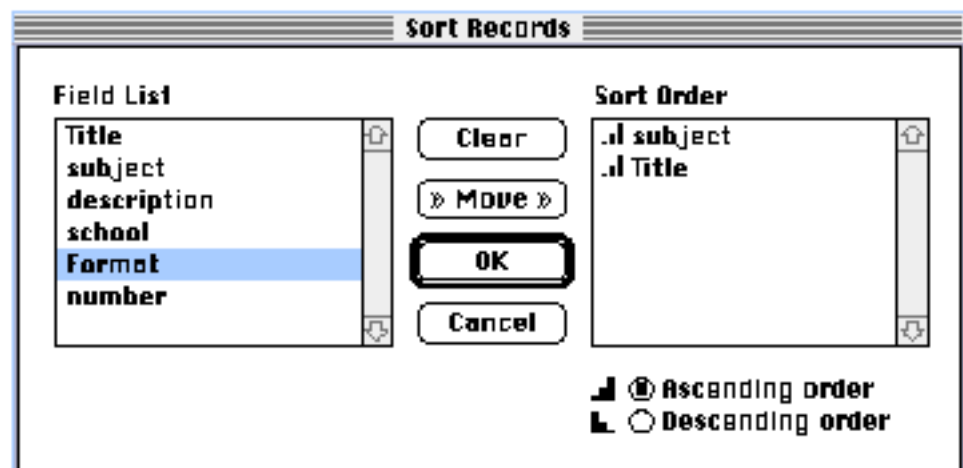
To Sort:

Go Organize...Sort Records

In the Field List box - click the field name that you want to give priority. In the example at the right, I selected Format.

When you choose a field the >>Move>> button, in the center, becomes active.

Note that the field you select in the Field List is added the selected field to the Sort Order box on the right.

Click on it.

As you can see in my example above, you can list several fields in Sort Order. When the database sorts, it will go in order from the top down. First, it will sort my records by subject, listing all the maths together, then all the science, etc. Then, within that order, it will a sort the titles in alphabetical order.

The Ascending Order button means in A-Z order (A before a) or 0-9. The Descending Order is the reverse. Check out the Help menu for information on blended letters and numbers.

When you have made your selections, **click OK.** There will be a pause of varying lengths depending on the size of your database and the speed of your processor. If you are doing it on an LC with 400 records... go make coffee.

http://homepage.mac.com/cohora/computer/db/sort.pdf

Not carved in stone:

If, after your sort, your want to change the order, go back to the Sort box and select the item in the Sort Order box. You'll see the <<Move<< button become active. Click it. Now, if you are not saying wow yet, go do this to your database.

I have "caught" people trying to hand alphabetize a list prior to entering it in the database. Agggggh!

Sort makes it possible to add people at anytime to your digital address book. Just go Edit...New Record. Enter their data. Then go Organize...Sort. They will jump into alphabetical order. Do I have to sort my address book? No! You should use Find to locate the record for the person you want. If you do, it really does not matter what order they are in.

A true confession:

> I have written over one 120 of these computer tips. Our school librarian suggested I make an index. I cannot explain why I opened a spreadsheet and began to enter the titles and other info in the columns. I guess I thought I'd get a nice column report. Anyway, as luck would have it, my husband looked over my shoulder around the tenth title.
>
> "What are you doing?" he asked. I told him I was making an index, feeling a foreboding that I was on the wrong track.
>
> "I'd do that in database," he said. He runs most of his business in FileMaker Pro (a serious database program).
>
> "But how will I get a nice table view?" I queried. "I'll have to do all that fussing in Layout."
>
> He patiently persisted in urging me to switch. I gave up and did as he suggested.
>
> "Tell me when you have ten records listed," he said. I set to work. When I was ready, he walked over and went Layout...New layout. He chose columnar. I could have died. There, before my eyes, was my database shown in a columnar format. Beautiful!
>
> "Thank you." I whispered. Sometimes he can be so handy!
>
> Thanks to Sort, and my husband, I always have a beautifully alphabetized list of my work. I can also sort it by date of writing, topic, and more.

Remember when I talked about [building your database](#)? I told you to think carefully about the content of the fields. Sort is a time "When in doubt, make a separate field" is so important. If my CD database, for example, listed all the same information, but all in one field, I could not use sort to prioritize it by each bit of info.

Someday maybe I'll tell you about the database I built for the school's auction. I "cleverly" put the business name and full address all in one field. I was able to make the address labels for the envelopes. I could have used mail merge to pull the donor's names over to the auction program, but I would have had every address as well. I was also very sorry I had done it when I wanted to use the database again the next year. Compute and learn!

For good database examples: take a look at how "fill in the blank forms" are presented. These creators have separate fields for everything. They know in the long run the information will be more useful entered this way.

"If at first you don't succeed, then skydiving definitely isn't for you."~ unknown

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