Student Skill Activity:
How to Create and Modify a Database

Why Learn This Skill?

Do you have a collection of sports cards, CDs, or DVDs? Have you ever kept a list of the names, addresses, and phone numbers of friends and relatives? If you have collected information and kept some sort of list or file, then you have created a database.

Learning the Skill

An electronic database is a collection of facts that are stored in a file on a computer. The information is organized in fields.

A database can be organized and reorganized in any way that is useful to you. By using database management system (DBMS)—special software developed for record keeping—you can easily add, delete, change, or update information. You give commands to the computer that tell it what to do with the information, and it follows these commands. When you want to retrieve information, the computer searches through the file, finds the information, and displays it on the screen.

Practicing the Skill

Activity 1:

Native American societies speak a variety of languages and include many different cultures and traditions. Follow these steps to build a database about the characteristics of various Native American groups around the time the English started settling in North America (early 1600s).

1. Determine the facts you want to include in your database. Subjects you might consider include: Where did they live? What language did they speak? Was the group a hunting society, an agricultural society, or did the group practice a mixture of hunting and farming?

2. Follow instructions in the DBMS that you are using to set up fields. Then enter each item of data in its assigned field.

3. Decide how you want to organize the facts in the database—geographically or alphabetically by the name of the Native American group.

4. Follow the instructions in your computer program to place the information in order you selected.

Activity 2:

Progressives shared a general concern about problems in American society that had arisen as a result of industrialization and urbanization. They did not, however, necessarily agree on which problems were most in need of reform or the proper solutions to those problems. Follow these steps to build a database about the various reform movements discussed in the chapter "The Progressive Movement."

1. Identify the reform movements and the progressive reformers who supported the movements you want to include in your database.
2. Follow instructions in the DBMS that you are using to set up fields. Then enter each item of data in its assigned field.
3. Decide how you want to organize the facts in the database—by type of reform (i.e., social reforms, economic reforms, political reforms), alphabetically by the name of reformers, or by some other criteria.
4. Follow the instructions in your computer program to place the information in order you selected.

Applying the Skill

Bring newspapers or news magazines to class. Using the steps described above, build a database of current political events. Include a brief explanation of why the database is organized the way it is and how it might be used in class.