Database glossary

Alphanumeric field - a type of field where you can store a mixture of numbers and letters.

Choice field - a type of field which gives you a list of items to choose from. A 'choice field' for eye colour could list blue, black, brown and green while, in a weather database, a choice field might offer dull, bright, cloudy and so on. Using this type of field can not only prevent errors and inconsistencies when you enter your data, it also encourages children to classify the objects in their database. When you use a database program in science, look for this feature.

Database - a collection of data about one topic. In school practice a database is a file of records. A commercial database can be a massive number of files about one topic.

Field length - tells the computer how much space an item of data takes up. The length of the field is measured in characters or key presses, i.e. the name red robin takes up 9 spaces, but you need extra space for longer names such as woodpecker.

Field types - different types of data need different field types. The most common field types are number and word types. Numbers often need units such as cm and kg.

Field - a field is the part of a file which stores a piece of information. A file might have fields storing 120cm, blue and 6.

Field names - often called headings or labels. For example, these are headings: height, eye colour and shoe size.

File - a collection of records. In practice it is what you save on the disc.

Chart - a feature to draw pie, bar and line graphs with the data. See the Graphs glossary on the next page.

Numeric field - a type of field where you can store numbers only. You need a numeric field to store heights and weights.

Pictogram - a very useful type of chart using symbols instead of bars. The symbols can be coloured blocks or pictures such as a stack of cars, aeroplanes or other symbol.

Records - a set of fields about one thing is called a record. The form you fill in on the screen about one thing or person is called a record.

Scattergraph - shows you if there is a pattern between two numeric fields such as between height and shoe-size. The scattergraph plots the fields as a series of dots and as you look along the dots, a line through them suggests a pattern. These are very useful but children rarely understand them. One work-around is to sort the data on say height, plot a bar chart of shoe-size and then see if the bars show a pattern.

Search - lets you select out certain records - e.g. search for all the people with brown eyes. You can do 'complex' searches where you search for all the people with brown eyes and black hair - so you can use a search to hunt for a pattern.

Spreadsheet - another type of program which can handle data. These programs share many features in common with database programs. If your set of data is quite small, say, just 10 records and you just want to draw graphs, a spreadsheet may be a better choice.

Sort - puts all the records into either alphabetical or numerical order. The direction of a sort can be ascending (A-Z, 1-9) or descending (Z-A, 9-1)

Field name or label

Field length

Record on screen

File

Fields

Records