



FileMaker and Microsoft Access:

A Criteria-Based Comparison

If you're trying to decide what database is going to best fit your needs, but have been wondering what the difference is between Microsoft® Access and FileMaker® software, below is a comparison based on the criteria that third-party reviewers use to evaluate database products. Discover why FileMaker is the #1-selling, easy-to-use database and has received the most awards from the experts.

Criteria	FileMaker	Microsoft Access
Ease of Getting Started	Simple to learn 30 basic database templates and intuitive, graphical interface allows new users to get started fast.	Requires database expertise More intricate user interface and lack of built-in database views makes initial learning curve high for new users.
Ease of Finding and Viewing Information	Automatically creates views Automatically creates table, list, and form views for all information. Able to view live web pages associated with database records. Web pages update when data is modified.	Views created manually Must manually create each view of information. Finding data requires mastery of a query system.
Scripting & Programming	Point & Click scripting Point & click scripting language with over 130 script steps allows users to easily automate any task. Programming expertise not required.	Programming knowledge required Selection of 56 macros covers some database tasks but many solutions require use of Visual Basic – a more complex programming language.
Customization	Simple customization Toolbars guide users in modifying fields, layouts, reports, or menus* in a few straightforward clicks.	High-level customization Numerous options and click paths require prior experience to navigate. Extensive customization requires knowledge of Visual Basic.
Reporting	Drag & Drop reporting Drag & drop reporting tools help create a variety of custom reports. Create and share Adobe® PDF files using built-in PDF Maker.	Manual design interface Wizards aid in creating simple reports however modifications require use of an advanced design interface. No PDF creation capabilities.
Database Capacity	8 terabyte capacity 8 terabyte limit per database**. Fields can hold 2GB of data.	2 gigabyte capacity 2GB limit per database. Text fields hold 255 characters, memo fields hold 65,535 characters.
Scalability	Supports individual to large workgroups FileMaker Pro supports up to 5 concurrent users, and FileMaker Server handles up to 250 users.	Supports small workgroups User may experience less than optimal performance with 20 or more users. No Access server available.***
Web Publishing	Share complete solution via web In one click, publish an entire database solution to the web using FileMaker Pro – no additional software required. Sharing allows users full read/write privileges with built-in security features.	Share components of solution Share individual forms and reports over the web, but not an entire database solution. Requires users to have installation of Microsoft Office to share files.
Security	Field-level access Flexible security options allow user to restrict access to databases, or specific layouts or fields within a database.	Database-level access Allows user to restrict access at database level only, more granular security not supported.
Platforms	Windows and Mac compatible Runs on both Windows and Mac (databases can be shared across platforms): Mac OS X 10.3.9 for PowerPC-based Macs, 10.4.5 for Intel-based Macs, Windows XP SP2, Windows 2000 SP4. FileMaker Mobile also supports both Palm and Windows Mobile.	Compatible with Windows only Runs on Microsoft Windows 2000 with Service Pack 3 (SP3), Windows XP, or later. Pocket Access supports Windows Mobile only, but not Palm.

Comparison is based on FileMaker 8.5 and Microsoft Access 2003.

*Menu customization is available in FileMaker Pro 8 Advanced.

** Capacity represents the limits imposed by the FileMaker architecture, the actual usable limits will vary based on other factors such as disk space, RAM, OS resource limits, etc.

*** SQL Server can be used to share an Access solution but usually requires a re-write of the Access application. <http://msdn.microsoft.com/library/default.asp?url=/library/en-us/dnmsde/html/msdeforvs.asp>