Exploring the Undocumented PROC SQL _METHOD Option

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Abstract
The SQL Procedure contains many powerful and elegant language features for SQL users to take advantage of. This paper explores the _METHOD option as an applications development and tuning tool. Attendees will learn how to use this undocumented and powerful option to better understand and control how a query processes.

Keywords: SQL, PROC SQL, _METHOD, undocumented, join algorithms

Introduction
PROC SQL supports a powerful “undocumented” option called _METHOD. Although undocumented features like the _METHOD option should be used with caution, SAS users may find this option to provide far greater value than risk. In fact, the _METHOD option is worth exploring because of the benefits related to gaining a better understanding of the processes during specific PROC SQL operations, including complex table joins and subqueries.

PROC SQL Join Algorithms and the _METHOD Option
When it comes to performing PROC SQL joins, users supply the names of the tables for joining along with the join conditions, and the PROC SQL optimizer determines which of the available join algorithms to use for performing the join operation. There are three algorithms used in the process of performing a join:

- **Nested Loop Join** – When an equality condition is not specified, a read of the complete contents of the right table is processed for each row in the left table.
- **Merge Join** – When the tables specified are already in the desired sort order, resources will not need to be extended to rearranging the tables.
- **Hash Join** – When an equality relationship exists, the smaller of the tables is able to fit in memory, no sort operations are required, and each table is read only once.

Application of the _METHOD Option
The PROC SQL _METHOD option can be used as an effective way to analyze a query process as well as for debugging purposes. Information from using the _METHOD option is displayed on the Log using a variety of codes. The codes and their corresponding descriptions associated with the _METHOD option appear in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SQXCRTA</td>
<td>Create table as Select.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQXSLCT</td>
<td>Select statement or clause.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQXJSL</td>
<td>Step loop join (Cartesian).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQXJM</td>
<td>Merge join operation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQXJNDX</td>
<td>Index join operation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQXJHSH</td>
<td>Hash join operation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQXSORT</td>
<td>Sort operation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQXSRC</td>
<td>Source rows from table.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQXFIL</td>
<td>Rows filtration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQXSUMG</td>
<td>Summary stats (aggregates) with GROUP BY clause.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQXSUMN</td>
<td>Summary stats with no GROUP BY clause.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the following example a _METHOD option is specified to show the processing hierarchy in a two-way equi-join.

**SQL Code**

```sql
PROC SQL _METHOD;
   SELECT MOVIES.TITLE, RATING, ACTOR_LEADING
       FROM MOVIES, ACTORS
       WHERE MOVIES.TITLE = ACTORS.TITLE;
QUIT;
```

**Results**

```sql
NOTE: SQL execution methods chosen are:
   sqxsict
   sqxjhsh
       sqxsrtc ( MOVIES )
   sqxsrct ( ACTORS )
```

**Conclusion**

The SQL Procedure’s _METHOD option provides a powerful and elegant language feature for users to take advantage of to help better understand complex operations such as joins, subqueries, and other processes.

**References**


Lafler, Kirk Paul (2002). PROC SQL Programming Tips; Software Intelligence Corporation, Spring Valley, CA, USA.

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