Best Practices – Things to Try When Your Table Won't Join

Problems in your data may prevent your table from joining correctly in ArcMap. Data tables may look fine when you open them, but show rows and columns of <Null> values when you try to use them in GIS.

Review your data file for these potential problems:

- Tables in Access should have a field (suggested name ID) defined as an AutoNumber and set as the primary key.

- When using data originally compiled in Excel, do not use calculated cells. These do not transfer properly to other file formats. If necessary, create a new column and use the Paste Special command to copy only the Values.

- Don't use punctuation characters (- & % # / etc) in folder, table or field names. There is one exception; you can use _ (underscore).

- Spaces anywhere in the path of the files are sometimes a problem. For Example: GIS projects\My Data\database of My Tables.mdb is not the best choice for file and folder names. Remove all spaces in all file and folder names.

- Make sure there are no spaces in the table names within Access. Instead, use capital letters to distinguish words. SummaryStats_2006 instead of Summary Statistics 2006

- Field names should start with a letter, not a number.
  Example: 2002rate should be changed to rate02 or rate2002

- For character/text data, make sure there are no leading blanks. Text should appear justified to the left, without spaces before the first character.

- Remain consistent with your capitalization. If you have multiples users that contribute to your data file, so data may be in ALL CAPS and some may be Mixed Case. Data in all UPPER case (e.g. COLE, OSAGE, BOONE) or all mixed/proper case (e.g. Cole, Osage, Boone) is recommended.

- Make sure there are no misspellings in your county names. The most common misspellings are:
     Daviess – sometimes has the 2nd 'S' missing
     DeKalb, McDonald – The 'K' and 'D' should be capitalized
     Ste. Genevieve – sometimes is missing the 'E' in Ste.

- Do not include the word 'County' in the name of the county.

- For St. Louis – it is St. Louis and St. Louis City – you should not add the word 'County' after St. Louis to denote the county of St. Louis.

- Make sure your data types match. Sometimes ZIP codes are in a Text field, sometimes in a number field. ZIP codes should be defined as Text to accommodate ZIP +4.

- If the data contains coordinates, make sure these fields are defined as Number, with a field size of Double.

- Data that was copied from a web page should always be first saved in the TXT file format. This will remove any formatting (HTML) that is still associated with the data.

- There are several field names that are reserved and should not be used in Access. They can be found at: http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?scid=kb;EN-US;q248738

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