

Databases in the IAML website:

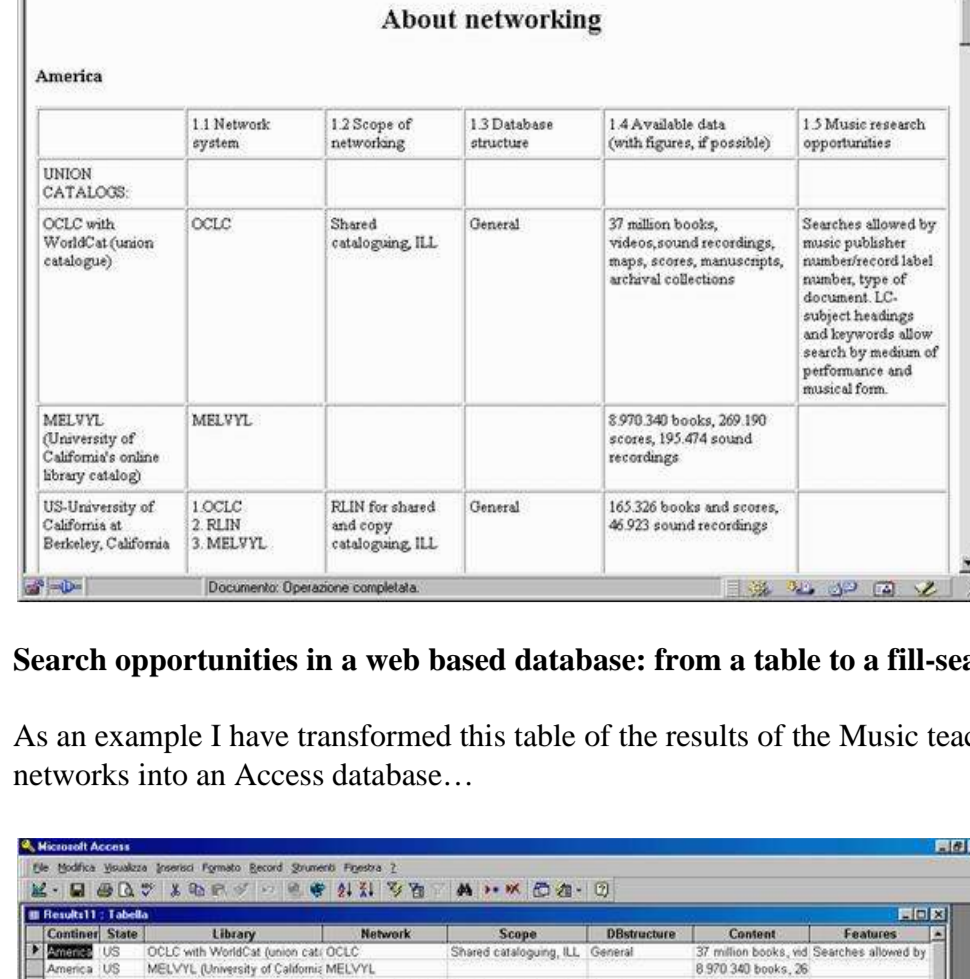
What you can do, what I must do

Massimo Gentili-Tedeschi



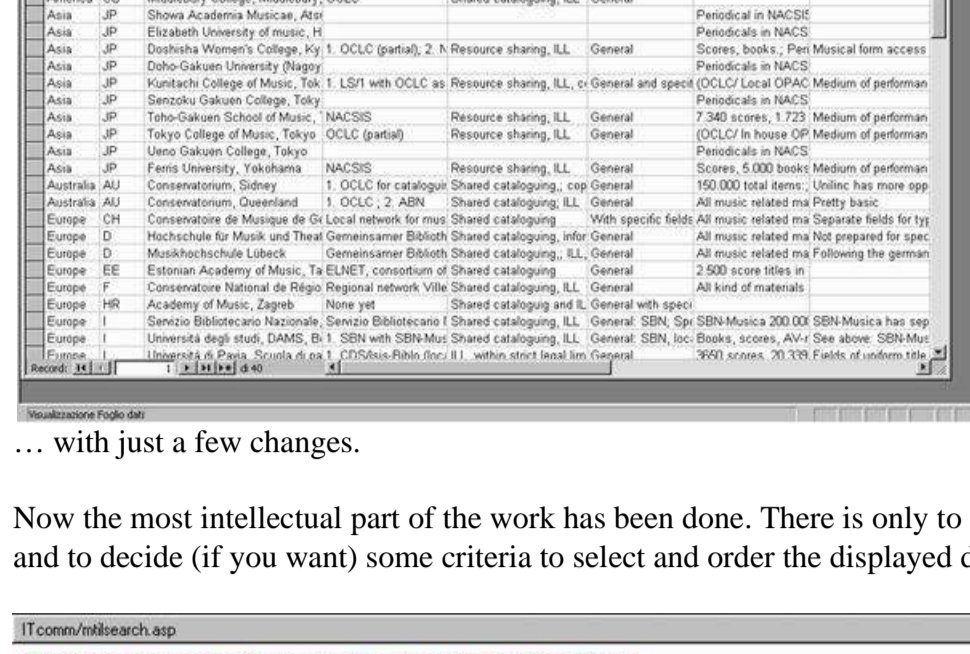
Search opportunities in a web based database: from a table to a fill-search database

As an example I have transformed this table of the results of the Music teaching institutions libraries commission questionnaire on library networks into an Access database...



... with a few changes.

Now the most intellectual part of the work has been done. There is only to decide to give a look to the data once they are displayed in the web and to decide (if you want) some criteria to select and order the displayed data.

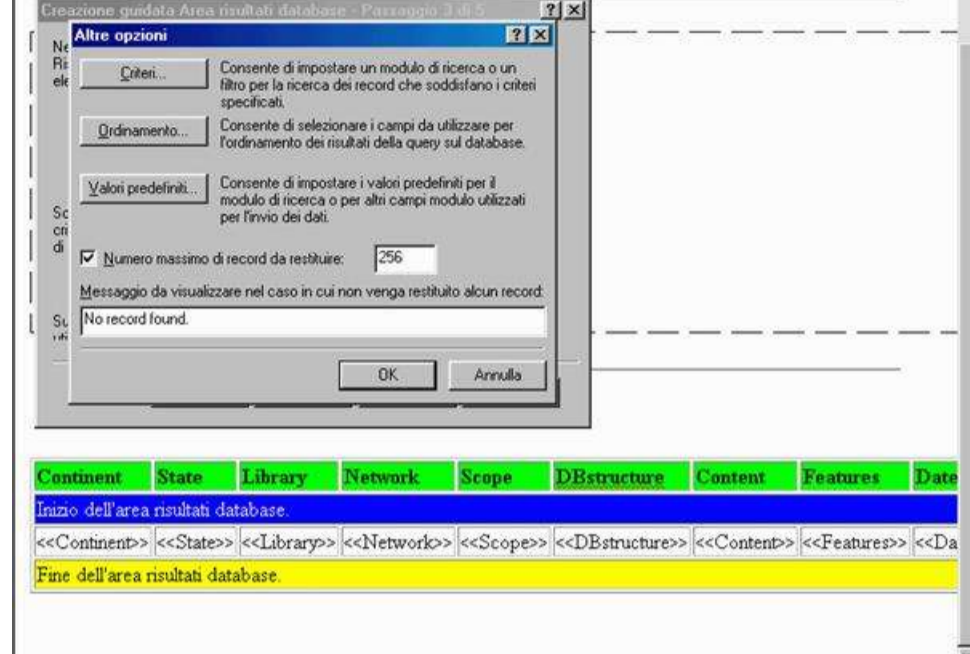


Once one has selected the database and the table he wants to use, it is possible to select the fields of the database he wants to show



One can choose several parameters:

- Search criteria: fields and conditions you want to use to display selected records
- How to order the displayed records
- Default pre-defined search strings (values can always be changed by users, but they come back if the reset button is pushed)
- Max number of records that can be displayed
- Standard message if no record matches search criteria

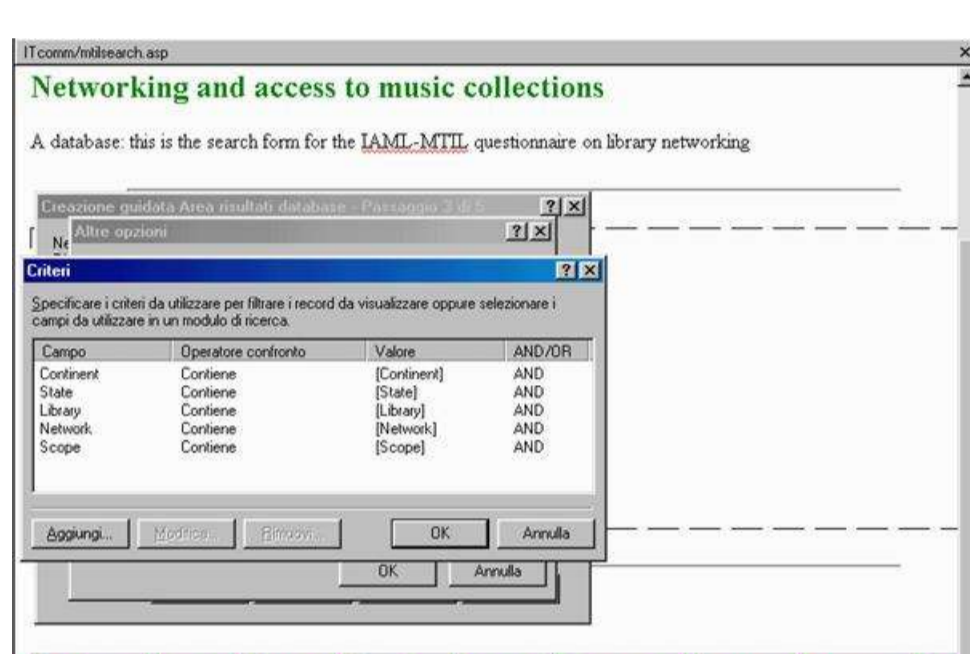


It is possible to choose the fields you want to use as search string and the search criteria to display records of the database in the database results area.

Basically this is what it will happen for every search method:

- =: field in the DB will match search criteria only if it is equal to search string
- begins: field will match search criteria if it begins with search string
- contains: field will match search criteria if it contains the search string

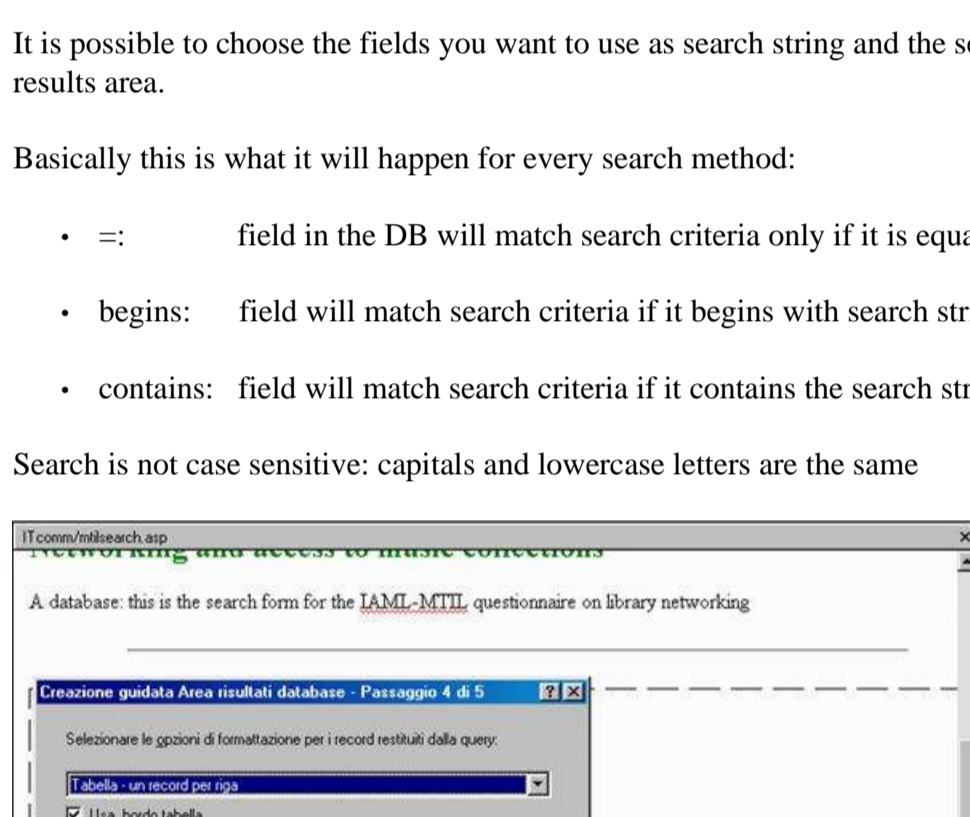
Search is not case sensitive: capitals and lowercase letters are the same



There are different display formats: table (with some further options like borders, dimensions, inclusion of field headers)...

In the green cells one can define the column names for the table

Note that column names are not necessarily the same as the field names

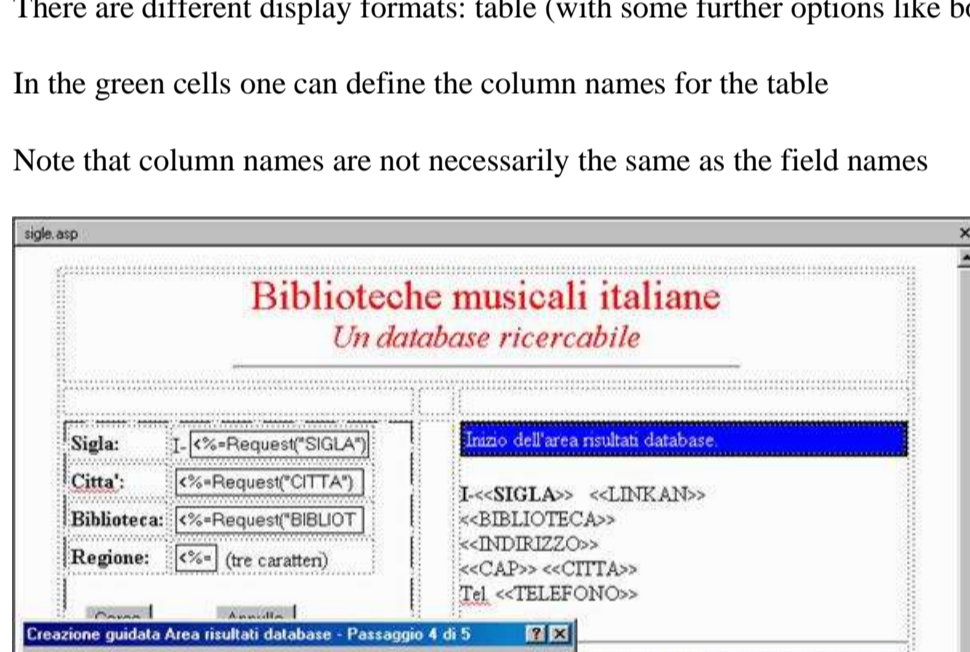


... or as a list, with various options for the final look [note that in this example there is a different database]:

- display every field in a separate paragraph
- divide fields in different lines
- make ordered, unordered or definition lists
- make text fields or scroll windows
- add field names and/or insert a line between different records

There is then have the possibility to modify the position of the fields as one's wish, adding or removing spaces of paragraph signs, adding words or changing font, etc.

As a final option one can display all possible records or divide them into separate windows of a pre-defined number of records (in this example I selected 10 items per screen)



The search results are displayed in the search page itself.

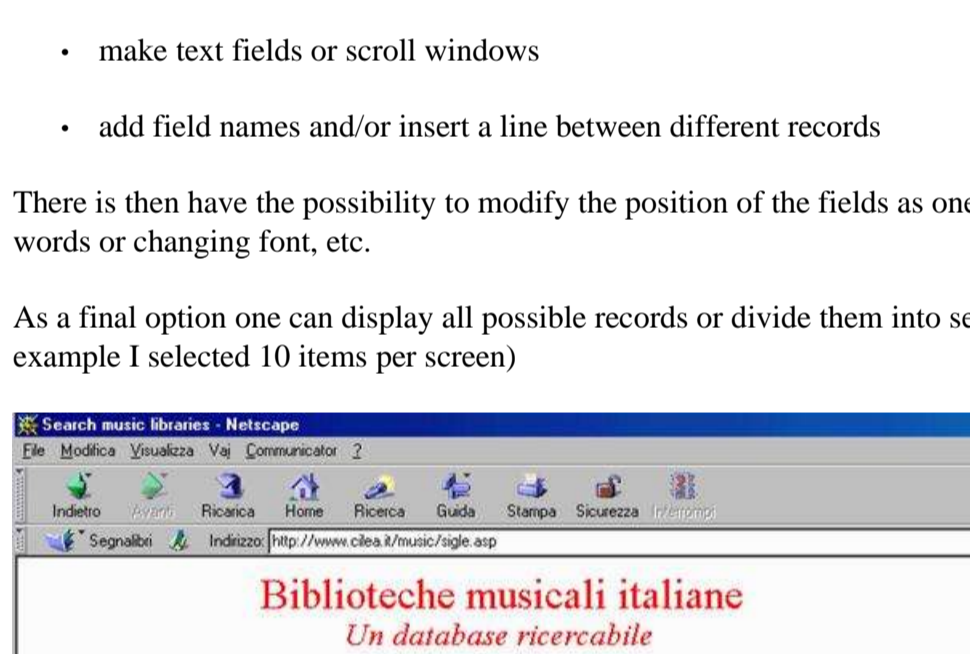
You can format the page as you like and add the text you desire (but frames are difficult to use).

Note that one can add hyperlinks, there is an option to specify this kind of field content double clicking on the field when preparing the layout of the database results area.

2. adding new records?

There are two options:

1: a do-it-yourself input form directly linked to the database. It is not possible to have control on the input data except the formal ones that one decides to introduce.



Input fields can be of different type and size.

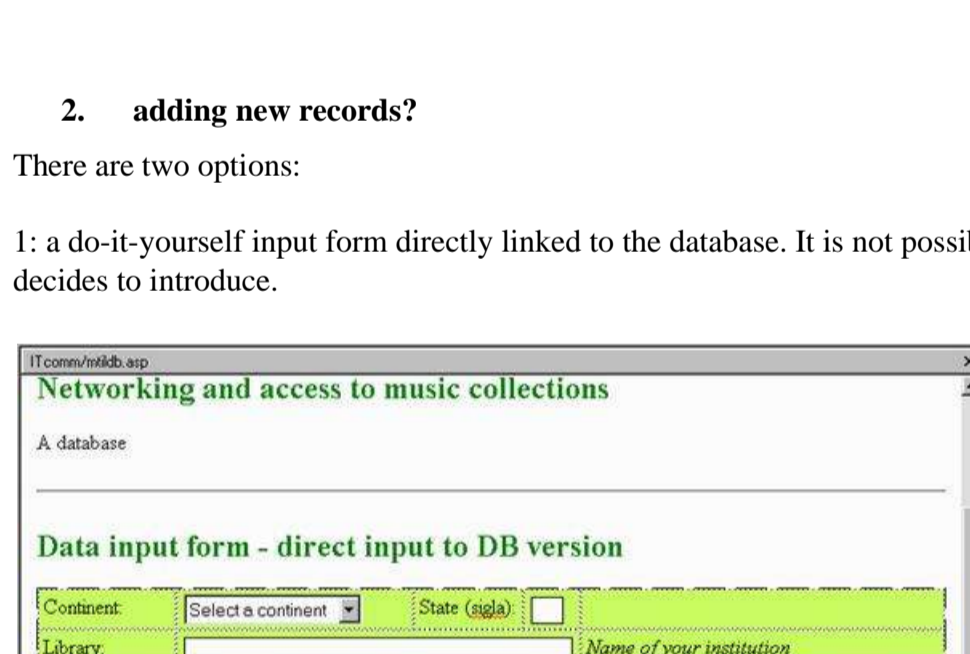
- Single (or multiple, but they are a bit more risky for the db structure) line strings
- Scroll lists, where the user selects one term of your choice
- Radio buttons that the user can select (one excludes the other)
- Checkboxes for YES/NO choices

Controls one can introduce are like:

- Field must contain letters or numbers or symbols
- Field is required and has a min-max length
- Letters or numbers must be comprised in a pre-defined range

One can also add non-visible fields like the date the record was created, the name of the PC who created the record, or fixed fields that are not comprised in the fill-in form. Of course these fields would be included in the DB structure.

2: a fill-in form that sends (you, or me or anyone else) an email message containing all input

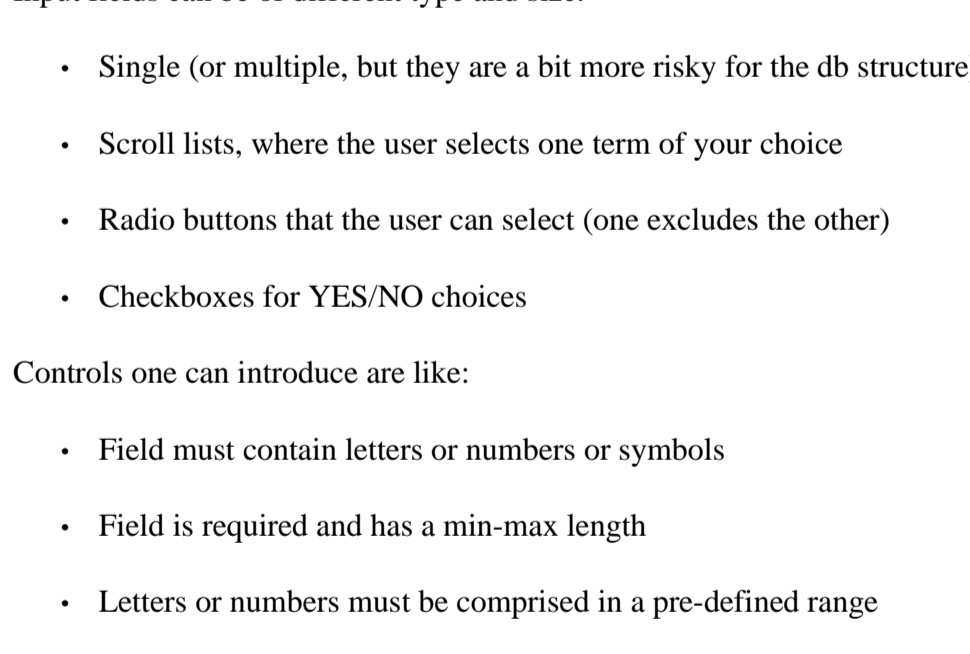


The form is almost the same, what you get is somehow cryptic, but it is enough to update the database:

You see here:

- the object of the message ("MTIL+update")
- all the field names and field contents (all spaces appear as "+", some special characters show problems, see the "@" as "%40", but never mind)
- the email address of the sender (both as sender of the message and as an added field of the fill-in form)

And this is the result!



Conclusion:

Introducing databases in the IAML website is an opportunity, and it is easy to realise it.

It is the result of an interaction between the volunteer and the webmaster.

This demonstration is just to show you what are the features and what are the options; you don't need to manage everything, just to tell the webmaster what are you choices.

What you must do:

- Have a good idea
- Prepare the database (best an Access 97 .mdb file)
- Prepare a list of the search fields and of the search criteria
- Prepare a list of the display fields, with their labels
- "Design" a display view and an overview of the webpage you would like to see
- If needed, choose an input form and an input method, indicating:
 - Input fields and type of search fields (one-line strings, scroll lists, etc.)
 - Input conditions
 - Labels for the input fields, comments or helps, etc.
 - Provide a list of any further desires or needs

What the webmaster (me...) must do:

- To cut and paste, cut and paste, cut and paste, send, prepare machinery, nervously eat chewing-gum, blaspheme, say "hurrah", and a few more things
- To tell you "it's OK now, do you like it?"
- To cut and paste, cut and paste, cut and paste, send, prepare machinery, nervously eat chewing-gum, blaspheme, say "hurrah", and a few more things