

PL/pgSQL Triggers

 PostgresPro

17

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Authors Egor Rogov, Pavel Luzanov, Ilya Bashtanov, Igor Gnatyuk

Translated by Liudmila Mantrova and Alexander Meleshko

Photo by Oleg Bartunov (Tukuche peak, Nepal)

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Triggers and trigger functions

Trigger behavior

Execution context of a trigger function

Return values

Do's and Don'ts

Triggers and functions



Trigger

a database object: a list of events to process
once an event occurs, the trigger function is called, and the call context is passed to this function

Trigger function

a database object: event-processing code
executed in the same transaction as the main operation
convention: the function does not take any parameters,
returns a value of the trigger pseudotype (which is virtually record)
can be reused with multiple triggers

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Triggers are used to set off particular actions in response to particular events. A trigger consists of two parts: the trigger itself (which defines the events) and a trigger function (which defines the actions). Both the trigger and the function are independent database objects.

When an event occurs which the trigger is waiting for, the trigger function is called. It receives the context of the call, which defines the exact trigger that has called the function and the exact conditions that have led to this call.

A trigger function is a regular function that follows some conventions:

- It can be written in any language except pure SQL.
- It must have no parameters.
- Its return value is of the *trigger* type (which is actually a pseudotype; a record corresponding to a table row is returned instead).

The trigger function is executed in the same transaction as the main operation. Thus, if a trigger function results in an error, the whole transaction is aborted.

<https://postgrespro.com/docs/postgresql/17/trigger-definition>

Events



INSERT, UPDATE, DELETE

tables	before/after statement before/after row
views	before/after statement instead of row

TRUNCATE

tables	before/after statement
--------	------------------------

WHEN condition

sets an additional filter

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Triggers can fire for INSERT, UPDATE, or DELETE operations performed on tables or views, as well as for the TRUNCATE operation on tables.

A trigger can fire before the specified action (BEFORE), after the action (AFTER), or instead of the action (INSTEAD OF).

A trigger can fire once for the whole operation (FOR EACH STATEMENT) or for each affected row (FOR EACH ROW).

There are some combinations of these conditions that are not supported. For example, INSTEAD OF triggers can be defined only for views at the row level, while TRUNCATE triggers can be defined only for tables and only at the statement level. Possible combinations are listed on this slide.

Besides, you can limit the area controlled by the trigger by specifying the WHEN condition: if this condition is false, the trigger does not fire.

<https://postgrespro.com/docs/postgresql/17/sql-createtrigger>

Before statement



Triggers

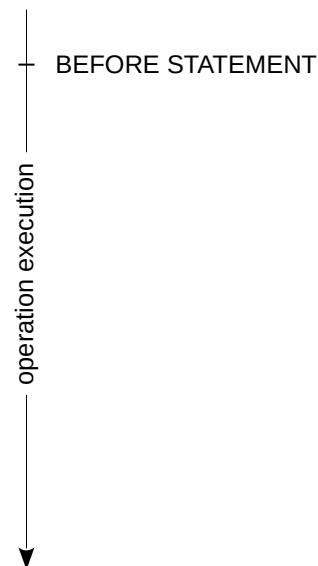
before the operation

Return values

is ignored

Context

TG variables



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Let's take a closer look at different trigger types.

The BEFORE STATEMENT trigger fires only once per operation, regardless of the number of affected rows (even if there are none). It happens before the start of the operation.

The return value of the trigger function is ignored. If there is an error in the trigger, the operation is canceled. Since the trigger function has no parameters, the call context in PL/pgSQL is passed via predefined TG variables, such as:

- TG_WHEN = BEFORE
- TG_LEVEL = STATEMENT
- TG_OP = INSERT/UPDATE/DELETE/TRUNCATE

etc. You can also pass a user-defined context (which is analogous to the absent parameters) via the TG_ARGV variable, although it is usually advisable to create several specialized functions instead of a single generic one.

<https://postgrespro.com/docs/postgresql/17/plpgsql-trigger>

Before row



Triggers

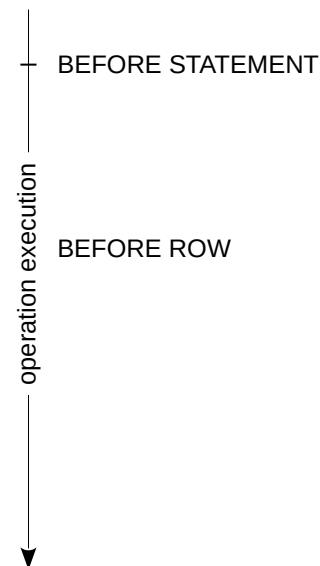
before the action on the row is taken
during the statement execution

Return values

a row (possibly modified)
null cancels the action

Context

OLD update, delete
NEW insert, update
TG variables



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BEFORE ROW triggers fire each time an operation is about to process a row. It happens right during the operation execution.

Trigger functions get the context via variables, such as:

- OLD — an old state of the row (undefined for insertion)
- NEW — an updated state of the row (undefined for deletion)
- TG_WHEN = BEFORE
- TG_LEVEL = ROW
- TG_OP = INSERT/UPDATE/DELETE

etc.

The NULL return value is interpreted as cancellation of the action for the current row. The execution of the operation itself will continue, but the current row won't be processed, and other triggers won't fire for this row.

To avoid interfering with the operation, the trigger must return the received row without any modifications, so it must always return NEW for insert and update operations. For delete operations, it can return any value except NULL (usually OLD is used).

But the trigger function can also change the NEW value to affect the result of the operation; this trigger is often defined exactly for this purpose.

Instead of row



Triggers

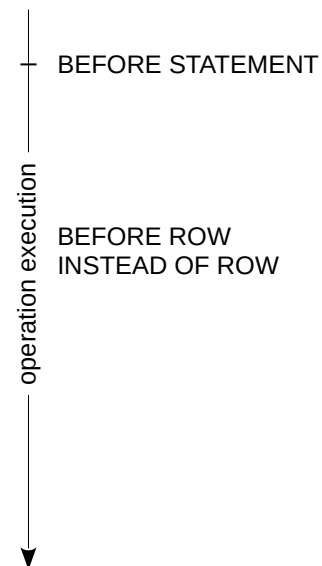
instead of the action on the row
for views

Return values

a row (possibly modified)
is shown in RETURNING
null cancels the action

Context

OLD update, delete
NEW insert, update
TG variables



INSTEAD OF triggers are very similar to BEFORE triggers, but they can be defined only for views and fire instead of the specified operation, not before it.

Such triggers usually perform operations on the base tables for views. The trigger can also return a modified NEW value: this value will be available when performing an operation with the RETURNING clause.

After row



Triggers

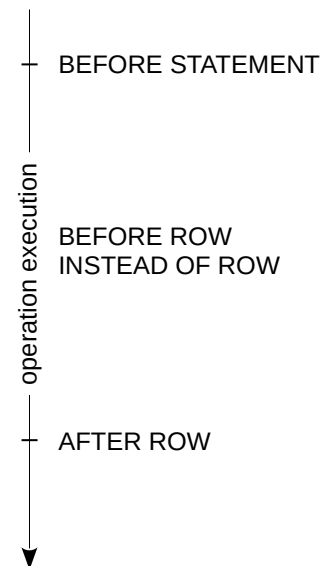
after operation execution
queue of rows satisfying the WHEN condition

Return values

are ignored

Context

OLD, OLD TABLE update, delete
NEW, NEW TABLE insert, update
TG variables



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Just as BEFORE ROW, AFTER ROW triggers fire for each affected row; but it happens only after the whole operation is complete, not immediately after processing the row, to avoid any inconsistencies due to the order the rows were processed in. For this purpose, all events are placed in a queue and processed after the operation has finished. The fewer events get queued, the smaller overhead will be incurred; that's why it is recommended to use the WHEN clause in this case, which can filter out the rows that we definitely won't need.

The return value of the AFTER ROW triggers is ignored (because the operation is already complete).

The context of the trigger function is constituted by the following variables:

- OLD — an old state of the row (undefined for insertion)
- NEW — an updated value of the row (undefined for deletion)

Apart from these variables, the trigger function can access special *transition tables*. The table specified as OLD TABLE when creating the trigger contains the old values of the rows processed by the trigger, and the NEW TABLE contains the new values of the same rows.

Regular TG variables are also available, including the following ones:

- TG_WHEN = AFTER
- TG_LEVEL = ROW
- TG_OP = INSERT/UPDATE/DELETE

After statement



Triggers

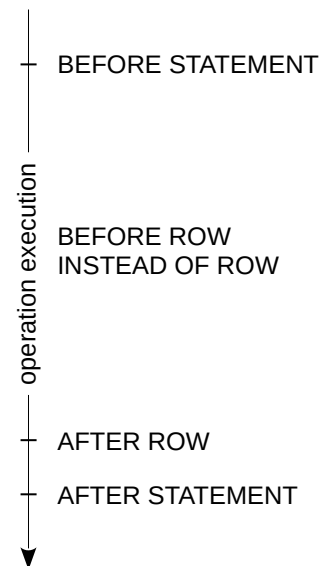
after the operation
(even if none of the rows are affected)

Return values

are ignored

Context

OLD TABLE update, delete
NEW TABLE insert, update
TG variables



The AFTER STATEMENT trigger fires after the operation has completed (including all the AFTER ROW triggers, if any). This trigger fires only once regardless of the number of the affected rows.

The return value of the trigger function is ignored.

The call context is passed using transition tables. The trigger function can access these table to analyze all the affected rows. Transition tables are usually used with AFTER STATEMENT, not with AFTER ROW triggers.

Besides, regular TG variables are defined, such as:

- TG_WHEN = AFTER
- TG_LEVEL = STATEMENT
- TG_OP = INSERT/UPDATE/DELETE/TRUNCATE

etc.

The triggers' firing order

Let's create a "universal" trigger function that describes the context in which it is called. The context is passed in various TG variables.

We are going to define triggers for various events and observe the order in which the triggers are fired during execution.

```
=> CREATE OR REPLACE FUNCTION describe() RETURNS trigger
AS $$
DECLARE
    rec record;
    str text := '';
BEGIN
    IF TG_LEVEL = 'ROW' THEN
        CASE TG_OP
            WHEN 'DELETE' THEN rec := OLD; str := OLD::text;
            WHEN 'UPDATE' THEN rec := NEW; str := OLD || ' -> ' || NEW;
            WHEN 'INSERT' THEN rec := NEW; str := NEW::text;
        END CASE;
    END IF;
    RAISE NOTICE '% % % %: %',
        TG_TABLE_NAME, TG_WHEN, TG_OP, TG_LEVEL, str;
    RETURN rec;
END
$$ LANGUAGE plpgsql;
```

CREATE FUNCTION

A table:

```
=> CREATE TABLE t(
    id integer PRIMARY KEY,
    s text
);
```

CREATE TABLE

Triggers at the statement level:

```
=> CREATE TRIGGER t_before_stmt
BEFORE INSERT OR UPDATE OR DELETE -- events
ON t                               -- table
FOR EACH STATEMENT                 -- level
EXECUTE FUNCTION describe();       -- trigger function
```

CREATE TRIGGER

```
=> CREATE TRIGGER t_after_stmt
AFTER INSERT OR UPDATE OR DELETE ON t
FOR EACH STATEMENT EXECUTE FUNCTION describe();
```

CREATE TRIGGER

Triggers at the row level:

```
=> CREATE TRIGGER t_before_row
BEFORE INSERT OR UPDATE OR DELETE ON t
FOR EACH ROW EXECUTE FUNCTION describe();
```

CREATE TRIGGER

```
=> CREATE TRIGGER t_after_row
AFTER INSERT OR UPDATE OR DELETE ON t
FOR EACH ROW EXECUTE FUNCTION describe();
```

CREATE TRIGGER

Let's perform an insert operation:

```
=> INSERT INTO t VALUES (1, 'aaa'), (2, 'bbb');
```

```
NOTICE: t BEFORE INSERT STATEMENT:
NOTICE: t BEFORE INSERT ROW: (1,aaa)
NOTICE: t BEFORE INSERT ROW: (2,bbb)
NOTICE: t AFTER INSERT ROW: (1,aaa)
NOTICE: t AFTER INSERT ROW: (2,bbb)
NOTICE: t AFTER INSERT STATEMENT:
INSERT 0 2
```

And now run an update operation:

```
=> UPDATE t SET s = 'ccc' WHERE id = 1;

NOTICE: t BEFORE UPDATE STATEMENT:
NOTICE: t BEFORE UPDATE ROW: (1,aaa) -> (1,ccc)
NOTICE: t AFTER UPDATE ROW: (1,aaa) -> (1,ccc)
NOTICE: t AFTER UPDATE STATEMENT:
UPDATE 1
```

Statement-level triggers will fire even if the command has not processed any rows at all:

```
=> UPDATE t SET s = 'ddd' WHERE id = 0;

NOTICE: t BEFORE UPDATE STATEMENT:
NOTICE: t AFTER UPDATE STATEMENT:
UPDATE 0
```

Here is a subtle point: the INSERT statement with the ON CONFLICT clause activates BEFORE triggers both on inserts and updates:

```
=> INSERT INTO t VALUES (1,'ddd'), (3,'eee')
ON CONFLICT(id) DO UPDATE SET s = EXCLUDED.s;

NOTICE: t BEFORE INSERT STATEMENT:
NOTICE: t BEFORE UPDATE STATEMENT:
NOTICE: t BEFORE INSERT ROW: (1,ddd)
NOTICE: t BEFORE UPDATE ROW: (1,ccc) -> (1,ddd)
NOTICE: t BEFORE INSERT ROW: (3,eee)
NOTICE: t AFTER UPDATE ROW: (1,ccc) -> (1,ddd)
NOTICE: t AFTER INSERT ROW: (3,eee)
NOTICE: t AFTER UPDATE STATEMENT:
NOTICE: t AFTER INSERT STATEMENT:
INSERT 0 2
```

And finally, let's try out deletion:

```
=> DELETE FROM t WHERE id = 2;

NOTICE: t BEFORE DELETE STATEMENT:
NOTICE: t BEFORE DELETE ROW: (2,bbb)
NOTICE: t AFTER DELETE ROW: (2,bbb)
NOTICE: t AFTER DELETE STATEMENT:
DELETE 1
```

There is no dedicated trigger for the MERGE operator (introduced in PostgreSQL 15), use regular triggers for UPDATE, INSERT, DELETE:

```
=> MERGE INTO t
USING (VALUES (1, 'fff'), (3, 'ggg'), (4, 'hhh')) AS vals(id, s)
ON t.id = vals.id
WHEN MATCHED AND t.id = 1 THEN
    UPDATE SET s = vals.s
WHEN MATCHED THEN
    DELETE
WHEN NOT MATCHED THEN
    INSERT (id, s)
    VALUES (vals.id, vals.s);

NOTICE: t BEFORE INSERT STATEMENT:
NOTICE: t BEFORE UPDATE STATEMENT:
NOTICE: t BEFORE DELETE STATEMENT:
NOTICE: t BEFORE UPDATE ROW: (1,ddd) -> (1,fff)
NOTICE: t BEFORE DELETE ROW: (3,eee)
NOTICE: t BEFORE INSERT ROW: (4,hhh)
NOTICE: t AFTER UPDATE ROW: (1,ddd) -> (1,fff)
NOTICE: t AFTER DELETE ROW: (3,eee)
NOTICE: t AFTER INSERT ROW: (4,hhh)
NOTICE: t AFTER DELETE STATEMENT:
NOTICE: t AFTER UPDATE STATEMENT:
NOTICE: t AFTER INSERT STATEMENT:
MERGE 3
```

Transition tables

Let's create a trigger function that shows the contents of transition tables. Here we use old_table and new_table names: they will be declared as part of the trigger definition.

Transition tables look just like regular ones, but they are not included into the system catalog and are located in RAM (although

they can be flushed to disk if they get too large).

```
=> CREATE OR REPLACE FUNCTION transition() RETURNS trigger
AS $$
DECLARE
    rec record;
BEGIN
    IF TG_OP = 'DELETE' OR TG_OP = 'UPDATE' THEN
        RAISE NOTICE 'Old state: ';
        FOR rec IN SELECT * FROM old_table LOOP
            RAISE NOTICE '%', rec;
        END LOOP;
    END IF;
    IF TG_OP = 'UPDATE' OR TG_OP = 'INSERT' THEN
        RAISE NOTICE 'New state: ';
        FOR rec IN SELECT * FROM new_table LOOP
            RAISE NOTICE '%', rec;
        END LOOP;
    END IF;
    RETURN NULL;
END
$$ LANGUAGE plpgsql;
```

CREATE FUNCTION

Let's create a new table:

```
=> CREATE TABLE trans(
    id integer PRIMARY KEY,
    n integer
);
```

CREATE TABLE

```
=> INSERT INTO trans VALUES (1,10), (2,20), (3,30);
```

INSERT 0 3

To create transition tables for an operation, you have to specify their names in the trigger definition:

```
=> CREATE TRIGGER t_after_upd_trans
AFTER UPDATE ON trans -- one event per trigger
REFERENCING
    OLD TABLE AS old_table -- it's OK to specify only one table,
    NEW TABLE AS new_table -- there is no need to provide both
FOR EACH STATEMENT
EXECUTE FUNCTION transition();
```

CREATE TRIGGER

Let's check the result:

```
=> UPDATE trans SET n = n + 1 WHERE n <= 20;
```

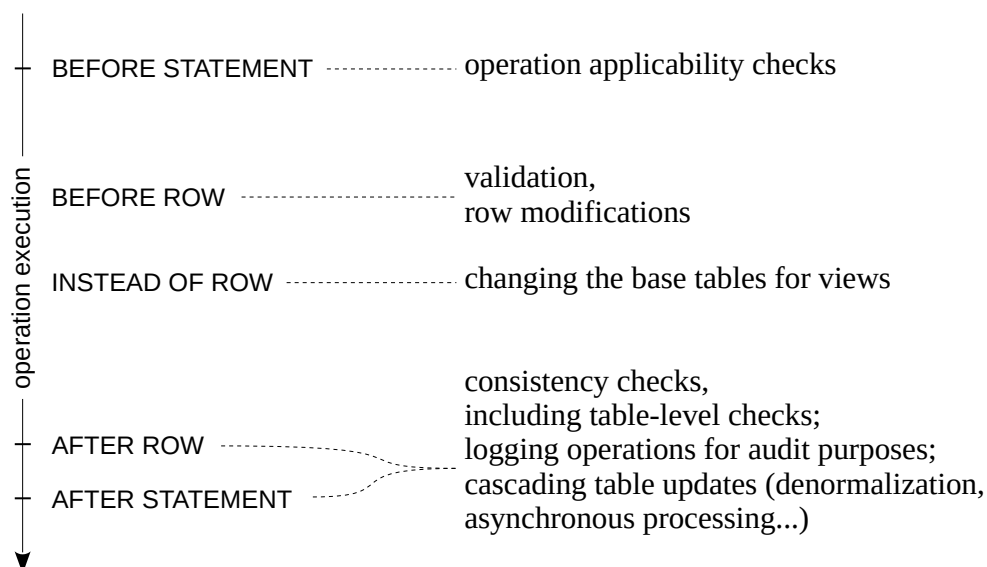
```
NOTICE: Old state:
NOTICE: (1,10)
NOTICE: (2,20)
NOTICE: New state:
NOTICE: (1,11)
NOTICE: (2,21)
UPDATE 2
```

Transition tables contain only those rows that have been affected by the operation.

In addition to updates, transition tables are also supported for INSERT and DELETE operations, although only one table will be available at a time: OLD TABLE is unavailable for inserts, while NEW TABLE is unavailable for deletes.

Since AFTER ROW triggers fire after the whole operation is completed, they can also use transition tables. But there is usually no point in it.

Possible use cases



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What are triggers actually used for?

BEFORE triggers can be used to check if the operation is valid and to raise errors if required.

BEFORE ROW triggers can be used to modify a row (for example, fill an empty field with the required value). It is convenient to use such triggers to avoid repeating the logic of filling out “technical” fields in each operation, as well as tweak the application behavior if its code cannot be modified.

INSTEAD OF ROW triggers are used to translate operations on views into the corresponding operations on the underlying base tables.

AFTER ROW and AFTER STATEMENT triggers can be useful for getting the exact state after the operation (BEFORE triggers may affect the result, so the state is not yet clear at this stage):

- To check consistency of the operation.
- To perform audit operations, i.e., logging all changes in a separate storage.
- To cascade changes to other tables (for example, to update denormalized data if the base tables have changed, or queue changes for subsequent processing outside of the current transaction).

If the operation affects multiple rows, it may be more efficient to use AFTER STATEMENT on transition tables instead of AFTER ROW as it can process changes in batches.

Challenges



The code is called implicitly

the execution logic is hard to track

Visibility rules for volatile trigger functions

the result of BEFORE ROW and INSTEAD OF ROW triggers is visible

The order of calling triggers for one and the same event

triggers fire in the alphabetical order

Infinite looping can occur

a trigger can activate other triggers

Integrity constraints can be broken

for example, by excluding rows that have to be deleted

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Triggers should not be overused. As they fire implicitly, the logic of the application becomes obscure, thus making its maintenance hugely complicated. Attempts to use triggers for implementing complex logic are usually quite unfortunate.

In some cases, you can use generated columns instead of triggers (GENERATED ALWAYS AS ... STORED). If applicable, this solution is sure to be more transparent and easier to implement.

There is a number of subtle points related to using triggers; we consciously skip their detailed discussion here:

- visibility rules of volatile functions in BEFORE ROW and INSTEAD OF ROW triggers (do not rely on the order of triggers when accessing a table)
- the order of calling several triggers on one and the same event (do not aggravate implicit firing of triggers by relying on their exact processing sequence)
- a possibility of infinite looping if cascade firing of triggers leads to another activation of the first trigger
- a risk of integrity constraint violation (for example, referential integrity can be compromised when skipping a row deleted by the ON DELETE CASCADE condition)

If you see that these subtleties are important for your application, you should seriously consider redesigning it.

Examples of using triggers

Example 1: saving the history of row changes.

Suppose we have a table that contains the current data. The task is to save the main table's history of all row changes into a separate table.

Historical table support could be delegated to the application, but chances are high that some part of the history won't be saved if an error occurs. That's why we are going to solve this problem using triggers.

As an example, we will create two tables: one with actual, up-to-date data, and the other with historical data tracking all changes made to the first table.

The main table will store various British coins and the materials they are made of:

```
=> CREATE TABLE coins(  
    name text PRIMARY KEY,  
    material text  
);
```

CREATE TABLE

Let's create a clone of the main table and add "_history" to its name...

```
=> CREATE TABLE coins_history(LIKE coins);
```

CREATE TABLE

...and then add columns for validity range:

```
=> ALTER TABLE coins_history  
    ADD start_date timestamp,  
    ADD end_date timestamp;
```

ALTER TABLE

The first trigger function will be inserting a row into the historical table. Validity end date is left undefined, meaning that the row is the current one:

```
=> CREATE OR REPLACE FUNCTION history_insert() RETURNS trigger  
AS $$  
BEGIN  
    EXECUTE format(  
        'INSERT INTO %I SELECT ($1).*, current_timestamp, NULL',  
        TG_TABLE_NAME || '_history'  
    ) USING NEW;  
  
    RETURN NEW;  
END  
$$ LANGUAGE plpgsql;
```

CREATE FUNCTION

The second function will be turning the current row into a historical one by setting the end date of its validity:

```
=> CREATE OR REPLACE FUNCTION history_delete() RETURNS trigger  
AS $$  
BEGIN  
    EXECUTE format(  
        'UPDATE %I SET end_date = current_timestamp WHERE name = $1 AND end_date IS NULL',  
        TG_TABLE_NAME || '_history'  
    ) USING OLD.name;  
  
    RETURN OLD;  
END  
$$ LANGUAGE plpgsql;
```

CREATE FUNCTION

Now let's define triggers. Some important points to keep in mind:

- An update is treated as deletion followed by insertion; the order of triggers is important here (they fire in the alphabetical order).
- Current_timestamp returns the time of the transaction start, so if an update is performed, the start_date of one row will be the same as the end_date of another row.
- Using AFTER triggers allows avoiding issues with INSERT ... ON CONFLICT and potential conflicts with other triggers that may be defined on the main table.

```
=> CREATE TRIGGER coins_history_insert
AFTER INSERT OR UPDATE ON coins
FOR EACH ROW EXECUTE FUNCTION history_insert();
```

```
CREATE TRIGGER
```

```
=> CREATE TRIGGER coins_history_delete
AFTER UPDATE OR DELETE ON coins
FOR EACH ROW EXECUTE FUNCTION history_delete();
```

```
CREATE TRIGGER
```

Let's check our trigger implementation:

```
=> INSERT INTO coins VALUES ('penny', 'silver'), ('farthing', 'silver');
```

```
INSERT 0 2
```

```
=> UPDATE coins SET material = 'copper' WHERE name = 'penny';
```

```
UPDATE 1
```

```
=> UPDATE coins SET material = 'bronze' WHERE name = 'penny';
```

```
UPDATE 1
```

```
=> DELETE FROM coins WHERE name = 'farthing';
```

```
DELETE 1
```

```
=> INSERT INTO coins VALUES ('twentypence', 'sterling silver');
```

```
INSERT 0 1
```

```
=> UPDATE coins SET material = 'steel' WHERE name = 'penny';
```

```
UPDATE 1
```

```
=> SELECT * FROM coins;
```

name	material
twentypence	sterling silver
penny	steel

(2 rows)

The historical table stores the whole history of changes:

```
=> SELECT * FROM coins_history ORDER BY name, start_date;
```

name	material	start_date	end_date
farthing	silver	2025-04-26 21:24:50.683374	2025-04-26 21:24:55.947498
penny	silver	2025-04-26 21:24:50.683374	2025-04-26 21:24:52.780437
penny	copper	2025-04-26 21:24:52.780437	2025-04-26 21:24:53.866124
penny	bronze	2025-04-26 21:24:53.866124	2025-04-26 21:25:00.091032
penny	steel	2025-04-26 21:25:00.091032	
twentypence	sterling silver	2025-04-26 21:24:58.010965	

(6 rows)

And now we can use it to restore the state at any point in time (slightly similar to the MVCC mechanism). For example, at the very beginning the table looked as follows:

```
=> \set d '2025-04-26 21:24:50.732632+03'
```

```
=> SELECT name, material
FROM coins_history
WHERE start_date <= :d AND (end_date IS NULL OR :d < end_date)
ORDER BY name;
```

name	material
farthing	silver
penny	silver

(2 rows)

Examples of using triggers

Example 2: an updatable view.

Suppose we have two tables: airports and flights:


```
=> CREATE TABLE airports(
    code char(3) PRIMARY KEY,
    name text NOT NULL
);

CREATE TABLE

=> INSERT INTO airports VALUES
    ('LHR', 'London. Heathrow'),
    ('CDG', 'Paris. Charles de Gaulle'),
    ('JFK', 'New York. John F. Kennedy');
```

INSERT 0 3

```
=> CREATE TABLE flights(
    id integer PRIMARY KEY GENERATED ALWAYS AS IDENTITY,
    airport_from char(3) NOT NULL REFERENCES airports(code),
    airport_to char(3) NOT NULL REFERENCES airports(code),
    UNIQUE (airport_from, airport_to)
);
```

CREATE TABLE

```
=> INSERT INTO flights(airport_from, airport_to) VALUES
    ('LHR', 'CDG');
```

INSERT 0 1

For convenience, we can define a view:

```
=> CREATE VIEW flights_v AS
SELECT id,
    (SELECT name
     FROM airports
     WHERE code = airport_from) airport_from,
    (SELECT name
     FROM airports
     WHERE code = airport_to) airport_to
FROM flights;
```

CREATE VIEW

```
=> SELECT * FROM flights_v;
```

```
id | airport_from | airport_to
-----+-----+-----
 1 | London. Heathrow | Paris. Charles de Gaulle
(1 row)
```

But such a view does not support updates. For example, you won't be able to change the destination point using the following command:

```
=> UPDATE flights_v
SET airport_to = 'New York. John F. Kennedy'
WHERE id = 1;
```

ERROR: cannot update column "airport_to" of view "flights_v"
DETAIL: View columns that are not columns of their base relation are not updatable.

But we can define a trigger. A trigger function can look as follows (for brevity, we'll process only the destination airport, but it's not hard to add the departure airport as well):

```
=> CREATE OR REPLACE FUNCTION flights_v_update() RETURNS trigger
AS $$
DECLARE
    code_to char(3);
BEGIN
    BEGIN
        SELECT code INTO STRICT code_to
        FROM airports
        WHERE name = NEW.airport_to;
    EXCEPTION
        WHEN no_data_found THEN
            RAISE EXCEPTION 'Airport "%" is missing', NEW.airport_to;
    END;
    UPDATE flights
    SET airport_to = code_to
    WHERE id = OLD.id; -- ignore the id change
    RETURN NEW;
END
$$ LANGUAGE plpgsql;
```

CREATE FUNCTION

And the trigger itself will look like this:

```
=> CREATE TRIGGER flights_v_upd_trigger
INSTEAD OF UPDATE ON flights_v
FOR EACH ROW EXECUTE FUNCTION flights_v_update();
```

CREATE TRIGGER

Let's check the result:

```
=> UPDATE flights_v
SET airport_to = 'New York. John F. Kennedy'
WHERE id = 1;
```

UPDATE 1

```
=> SELECT * FROM flights_v;
```

id	airport_from	airport_to
1	London. Heathrow	New York. John F. Kennedy

(1 row)

An attempt to update the airport to the one missing from the table:

```
=> UPDATE flights_v
SET airport_to = 'Amsterdam. Schiphol'
WHERE id = 1;
```

ERROR: Airport "Amsterdam. Schiphol" is missing
CONTEXT: PL/pgSQL function flights_v_update() line 11 at RAISE

Takeaways



A trigger is a way to address a particular event

Using triggers, you can cancel an operation, modify its outcome, or perform additional actions

Triggers are executed as part of the main transaction; an error in a trigger aborts this transaction

Using AFTER ROW triggers and transition tables makes processing more expensive

Everything is good in moderation: complex logic is hard to debug because of implicit trigger execution

1. Create a trigger that handles updates of the `onhand_qty` field in the `catalog_v` view.
Check that the Catalog tab now allows ordering books.
2. Make sure that the following consistency requirement is met: the amount of available books cannot be negative (it is impossible to buy a book if it is not in stock).
Check your implementation carefully, keeping in mind that the application can be accessed by several users simultaneously.

2. It may seem that it's enough to define the AFTER trigger on the operations table to calculate the `qty_change` sum. However, at the READ COMMITTED isolation level used in the Bookstore application, we will have to acquire an exclusive lock on this table: otherwise, the check may not function properly in some scenarios.

Here is a better approach: extend the books table with the `onhand_qty` column and create a trigger that will be modifying `onhand_qty` values when the operations table is changed (i.e., you should virtually perform data denormalization). You can now define the CHECK constraint on the `onhand_qty` field to ensure data consistency. The `onhand_qty()` function created earlier is no longer required.

You should pay special attention to setting the initial value, keeping in mind that the database system may be serving some users while we apply these changes.

Task 1. Using a trigger to update the catalog

```
=> CREATE FUNCTION update_catalog() RETURNS trigger
AS $$
BEGIN
    INSERT INTO operations(book_id, qty_change) VALUES
        (OLD.book_id, NEW.onhand_qty - coalesce(OLD.onhand_qty,0));
    RETURN NEW;
END
$$ VOLATILE LANGUAGE plpgsql;

CREATE FUNCTION

=> CREATE TRIGGER update_catalog_trigger
INSTEAD OF UPDATE ON catalog_v
FOR EACH ROW
EXECUTE FUNCTION update_catalog();

CREATE TRIGGER
```

Task 2. Checking the quantity of books

Let's extend the table with the column that will store the quantity of the books available.

```
=> ALTER TABLE books ADD COLUMN onhand_qty integer;
```

ALTER TABLE

The trigger function for the AFTER trigger, which is fired on insertion to update the quantity of available books (we assume that the onhand_qty field cannot be empty):

```
=> CREATE FUNCTION update_onhand_qty() RETURNS trigger
AS $$
BEGIN
    UPDATE books
    SET onhand_qty = onhand_qty + NEW.qty_change
    WHERE book_id = NEW.book_id;
    RETURN NULL;
END
$$ VOLATILE LANGUAGE plpgsql;
```

CREATE FUNCTION

The remaining operations are performed within a single transaction.

```
=> BEGIN;
```

BEGIN

Locking the table for the duration of the transaction:

```
=> LOCK TABLE operations;
```

LOCK TABLE

Providing the initial value:

```
=> UPDATE books b
SET onhand_qty = (
    SELECT coalesce(sum(qty_change),0)
    FROM operations o
    WHERE o.book_id = b.book_id
);
```

UPDATE 7

Defining constraints now that the field is non-empty:

```
=> ALTER TABLE books ALTER COLUMN onhand_qty SET DEFAULT 0;
```

ALTER TABLE

```
=> ALTER TABLE books ALTER COLUMN onhand_qty SET NOT NULL;
```

ALTER TABLE

```
=> ALTER TABLE books ADD CHECK(onhand_qty >= 0);
```

ALTER TABLE

Creating a trigger:

```
=> CREATE TRIGGER update_onhand_qty_trigger
AFTER INSERT ON operations
FOR EACH ROW
EXECUTE FUNCTION update_onhand_qty();
```

CREATE TRIGGER

Done.

```
=> COMMIT;
```

COMMIT

Now the books.onhand_qty column is being updated, but the catalog_v view still calls a function to calculate the number of books. Although the syntax used for function access in the initial query is the same as that for the field access, the query has been stored in a different form:

```
=> \d+ catalog_v
```

View "bookstore.catalog_v"						
Column	Type	Collation	Nullable	Default	Storage	Description
book_id	integer				plain	
title	text				extended	
onhand_qty	integer				plain	
display_name	text				extended	
authors	text				extended	

View definition:

```
SELECT book_id,
       title,
       onhand_qty(b.*) AS onhand_qty,
       book_name(book_id, title) AS display_name,
       authors(b.*) AS authors
FROM   books b
ORDER BY (book_name(book_id, title));
```

Triggers:

```
update_catalog_trigger INSTEAD OF UPDATE ON catalog_v FOR EACH ROW EXECUTE FUNCTION
update_catalog()
```

Let's replace the view:

```
=> CREATE OR REPLACE VIEW catalog_v AS
SELECT b.book_id,
       b.title,
       b.onhand_qty,
       book_name(b.book_id, b.title) AS display_name,
       b.authors
FROM   books b
ORDER BY display_name;
```

CREATE VIEW

Now the function can be deleted.

```
=> DROP FUNCTION onhand_qty(books);
```

DROP FUNCTION

Let's run a small check:

```
=> SELECT * FROM catalog_v WHERE book_id = 1 \gx
```

```
-[ RECORD 1 ]+-----
book_id      | 1
title        | The Tale of Tsar Saltan
onhand_qty   | 19
display_name | The Tale of Tsar Saltan. Alexander S. Pushkin
authors      | Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin
```

```
=> INSERT INTO operations(book_id, qty_change) VALUES (1,+10);
```

INSERT 0 1

```
=> SELECT * FROM catalog_v WHERE book_id = 1 \gx
```

```
-[ RECORD 1 ]+-----
book_id      | 1
title        | The Tale of Tsar Saltan
onhand_qty   | 29
display_name | The Tale of Tsar Saltan. Alexander S. Pushkin
authors      | Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin
```

Incorrect operations are aborted:

```
=> INSERT INTO operations(book_id, qty_change) VALUES (1,-100);
```

ERROR: new row for relation "books" violates check constraint "books_onhand_qty_check"

DETAIL: Failing row contains (1, The Tale of Tsar Saltan, -71).

CONTEXT: SQL statement "UPDATE books

SET onhand_qty = onhand_qty + NEW.qty_change

WHERE book_id = NEW.book_id"

PL/pgSQL function update_onhand_qty() line 3 at SQL statement