

# Databricks Lakehouse Platform Cookbook

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*100+ recipes for building a scalable  
and secure Databricks Lakehouse*

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**Dr. Alan L. Dennis**



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**Dedicated to**

*My loving and supportive wife,*

*Kim*

# Foreword

There is no denying that data is the lifeblood of industry. Everyone understands that businesses that harness their data well, will thrive while the ones that do not, will fall by the wayside. Choosing the correct platform for your data estate is, perhaps, the most critical decision a business can make. The second most important factor is, of course, to hire the right team to build on this chosen platform.

2023 has shown us that GenAI is the future and I am convinced that there is only one data platform that is natively suited for the demands that GenAI will impose on the data estates of the future: the Lakehouse built on Databricks. Over the last 10 years, Databricks has transformed itself from a niche Spark-focused shop to a visionary organization building a holistic data platform that can support Analytics, Data Integration (a fancier term for ETL or ELT) and AI/ML: including the now white-hot GenAI use cases. While a lot of competing data platforms and data clouds make similar claims, there is only one platform, that is, Databricks: that has been doing cloud-native, multi-language data processing at scale: for 10 years now.

I consider myself fortunate that I discovered and fell in love with Apache Spark in 2014 and then got a chance to join Databricks in 2019. I am truly grateful that I got to pick the brains of some of the smartest minds in the universe during that time. The author of this book, Dr. Alan Dennis, is one such individual and it is my honor to count him as a friend and a business partner.

Whether you are a seasoned data professional or someone looking to unlock the potential of data in your organization, this book is your key to a data revolution. Databricks and the Lakehouse paradigm offer a fresh perspective on data management, and this book is your guide to mastering it. Alan's recipe-driven approach to teaching is perfect for the real world: it will enable you to deliver results quickly in the immediate term: and will help you connect the dots and build a strong foundation for self-learning over the longer term. The context-setting sections give you a quick history of features and approaches over the years. It will help you appreciate how the platform has evolved and most importantly, help you avoid old pitfalls and anti-patterns.

Apache Spark, Databricks and Lakehouse have transformed my life for the better: and it is my sincere hope and best wishes that you, the reader, have a similar fulfilling experience. Onward!

**Subramanian Iyer**

*Principal, Speedboat Professional Services*

*Award-winning Architect and Certified Instructor on Databricks and Lakehouse*

*Ex-Brickster (2019-2023) and Spark fanboy since 2014*

## About the Author

**Dr. Alan L. Dennis** has been writing software for over 30 years. His experiences range from being one of the first employees at a startup to leading a team of over twenty developers. He has held titles such as Programmer, Architect, Chief Technical Officer, and member of technical staff. He has worked for many Fortune 50 companies, with a wide range of industry experience.

He holds a Doctorate in Computer Science with a concentration in Big Data Analytics, a Master's in Computer Science with specialization in Artificial Intelligence, and a Bachelor's of Business Administration with focus on Computer Information Systems. He teaches graduate classes at several universities and is a Databricks Certified Trainer.

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## Acknowledgement

Many people have had a hand in this book. First, I would like to thank my parents for always supporting and encouraging me. They taught me to figure out how things work and, ideally, put them back together again afterward. My mother passed before this book could be completed. She will be missed, but her Heavenly Father called, and she went. I would also like to thank my wife Kim, for supporting and encouraging me and understanding when I disappear for weeks on end.

I would like to thank Jay, and Mahesh for their input to the book. They provided valuable feedback throughout the process. I would also like to thank Subramanian for his kind words in the foreword.

Lastly, I am incredibly thankful for you, gentle reader. I wrote this for you and I hope you find value in it. There is something for everyone in this book, let me know what you find.

# Preface

It is commonly understood that valuable insights can be found in an organization's data. One way to extract that value is to construct a Data Lakehouse. This book helps you create a Lakehouse on the Databricks Platform. It is the culmination of decades of data processing design and implementation.

It is not easy to create a data ecosystem. There are many competing priorities and technical challenges. This book walks you through the process, providing hands-on examples. We organize those steps into recipes. This keeps the author from waxing on about theory and helps the reader find the information needed in a given situation. We cover the theory behind the approaches used and guide the reader to avoid common pitfalls.

We start with the basics, such as explaining what a Databricks Lakehouse is, why we need them, and what value it brings. We move on to applying the concepts in practice. Part of the reason for constructing a Data Lakehouse is to enable users to access its data. We then discuss the various personas that benefit from a Databricks Lakehouse.

While we start with the fundamentals, we rapidly move on to more advanced topics. A good understanding of SQL, Python, Spark, and cloud computing would benefit the reader but is not required.

**Chapter 1: Introduction to Databricks Lakehouse** – This chapter provides a brief history of Big Data, Spark, and Databricks. It introduces the reader to the community edition of Databricks as a starting point for using Databricks. We discuss why we construct a Lakehouse and present the overall architecture. We provide clear definitions for each of the layers of a Databricks Lakehouse. We discuss design considerations and compare Lakehouses to other data technologies.

**Chapter 2: Setting-up a Databricks Workspace** – This chapter presents the information necessary to provision and effectively use a Databricks environment. This includes examining core Databricks concepts, service tier selection, and cloud selection considerations. Deployment details are examined, including those with long-lasting implications. Access control and other configurations are discussed, along with the types of clusters and performance levels.

**Chapter 3: Connecting to Storage** – This chapter covers the approaches and tradeoffs to connect to storage. The Databricks File System is discussed in detail as it is an important element of the Lakehouse platform. The background of the file system is reviewed, and



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various ways of connecting to storage are explored. The approaches to Lakehouse design are presented, with recommendations on how to organize a Lakehouse. Recommendations are provided regarding the documentation of allowed operations. Recipes containing various examples of connecting to Azure storage systems are provided.

**Chapter 4: Creating Delta Tables** – This chapter describes how to construct a Delta Lake, including a discussion of managed and external tables. Guidance is provided to help decide which type of table to create. Examples are provided of creating tables using SQL and the Spark API. Core concepts such as secret scopes are discussed, along with example of creating tables from AWS S3, GCP buckets, and Azure ADLS.

**Chapter 5: Data Profiling and Modeling in the Lakehouse** – This chapter examines two of the more important activities when constructing a Data Lakehouse. Various ways of performing profiling are examined, including Databricks’ native Data Profile feature. Discussion of the Databricks Describe and Summary features are included, along with analysis at scale using `ydata_profiling`.

**Chapter 6: Extracting from Source and Loading to Bronze** – This chapter covers the first step in refining data. A discussion is presented regarding using the raw zone or skipping it and going from source to bronze. Several ways of incrementally ingesting data are presented, which is essential for a high-performance Databricks Lakehouse. These methods include self-managed watermarks, Auto Loader, Delta Live Tables, and streaming data.

**Chapter 7: Transforming to Create Silver** – This chapter continues the refinement journey, picking up data at the Bronze layer and moving it to Silver. Both incremental and full refinement are discussed. Several approaches to processing are discussed, including the importance of data quality rules and expectations. Common Silver-to-Silver operations are discussed, including denormalization, JSON exploding, and projection reshaping.

**Chapter 8: Transforming to Create Gold for Business Purposes** – This chapter continues the discussion of refining data, with the goal of answering business questions. Gold tables are built to answer a specific question. The sources for Gold tables are discussed, with implementations in PySpark and Delta Live Tables. As Gold tables are optimized for consumption, a brief discussion of support-related operations such as vacuuming and optimizing tables is present.

**Chapter 9: Machine Learning and Data Science** – Data scientists are common users of the Databricks Lakehouse. We examine using Machine Learning in Databricks, and the use of AutoML. Next, we discuss MLflow, and the importance it plays in deploying models to production. Lastly, we briefly discuss the Databricks feature store.

**Chapter 10: SQL Analysis** – SQL is one of the most widely known languages. We discuss the SQL Analysis features built into Databricks, including Databricks SQL. We show how to create and manage a SQL Warehouse. We discuss the usage of the SQL Editor and use it to write common queries. We create dashboards and alerts using those queries. We close with a discussion of cost and performance considerations.

**Chapter 11: Graph Analysis** – There are many ways to perform analysis; one way is to use mathematical graph algorithms. We discuss the nature of graphs and when using graph algorithms is appropriate. We discuss GraphX and GraphFrames, along with the operations they enable and associated algorithms. Lastly, we discuss reading data from Neo4J’s AuraDB from Databricks.

**Chapter 12: Visualizations** – There are many ways to present data; visualizations can be very powerful. We discuss visualization best practices and how to create a Databricks dashboard. We also discuss native visualization support within a Databricks notebook. We conclude the chapter by discussing the use of Power BI with Databricks.

**Chapter 13: Governance** – Without proper governance, a Databricks Lakehouse will not be successful. We discuss the role of data governance and the use of Databricks’ Unity Catalog. We walk through the installation and usage of Unity Catalog and review the major benefits. We discuss the steps to install and use Azure Purview in combination with Unity Catalog.

**Chapter 14: Operations** – This chapter covers the steps necessary to keep a Lakehouse working effectively, including source code management and orchestration. Preventive scheduled maintenance can help avoid unacceptable processing time and outages. We also discuss how to manage and maintain visibility of costs.

**Chapter 15: Tips, Tricks, Troubleshooting, and Best Practices** – This final chapter contains important elements that did not make it into other parts of the book. We revisit ingesting data, by ingesting relational data. Discuss performance optimizations such as using pools. We discuss how to orchestrate notebooks. Lastly, we conclude with a discussion of best practices and guiding principles.

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# Code Bundle and Coloured Images

Please follow the link to download the *Code Bundle* and the *Coloured Images* of the book:

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The code bundle for the book is also hosted on GitHub at

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# Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction to Databricks Lakehouse .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction.....	1
Structure.....	1
Objectives .....	2
Background .....	2
Brief history of Big Data, Spark, and Databricks .....	2
Databricks community edition.....	3
<i>Recipe 1: Signing up for the Databricks community edition.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Recipe 2: Creating a notebook in the Databricks Community edition .....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Recipe 3: Changing a notebook's default language .....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Recipe 4: Create a table from CSV using SQL.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Recipe 5: Query a table using SQL.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Recipe 6: Examine a table's structure .....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Recipe 7: Use infer schema on CSV in SQL .....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Recipe 8: Compute mean in group by in SQL.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Recipe 9: Importing a notebook .....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Recipe 10: Exporting a notebook in Databricks Community Edition.....</i>	<i>12</i>
Data Lakehouse value proposition .....	13
Lakehouse architecture.....	14
<i>Separation of computing and storage.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Data lake.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Delta Lake.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Computational engine .....</i>	<i>16</i>
Design considerations.....	16
<i>Extraction and storage by system .....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Zones and their definitions.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Source.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Bronze .....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Silver .....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Gold.....</i>	<i>17</i>
Lakehouse compared to other data technologies .....	18

---

<i>Extract load transform and extract transform load</i> .....	18
<i>Compared to traditional data lake approaches</i> .....	18
<i>Differences from Lambda architecture</i> .....	19
Conclusion.....	19
Points to remember .....	19
<b>2. Setting-up a Databricks Workspace</b> .....	<b>21</b>
Introduction.....	21
Structure.....	21
Objectives .....	21
Core Databricks concepts .....	22
<i>Databricks service tiers</i> .....	22
<i>Brief introduction of Databricks features</i> .....	22
<i>Machine Learning</i> .....	22
<i>Notebook access control</i> .....	23
<i>Databricks SQL and endpoints</i> .....	23
<i>Internet protocol addresses access control</i> .....	23
<i>Databricks pricing model</i> .....	23
Pick your cloud .....	23
<i>AWS</i> .....	24
<i>Azure</i> .....	28
<i>Google Cloud Platform</i> .....	31
Deployment details .....	36
<i>Public availability</i> .....	36
<i>Network size</i> .....	36
<i>Network peering</i> .....	36
Initial configuration .....	37
<i>Access control</i> .....	37
<i>Cluster types</i> .....	38
<i>All purpose</i> .....	38
<i>Job clusters</i> .....	38
<i>Cluster creation details</i> .....	38
<i>Single or multiple nodes</i> .....	38
<i>Access mode</i> .....	38

---

<i>Choosing performance level</i> .....	39
Conclusion.....	40
<b>3. Connecting to Storage</b> .....	<b>41</b>
Introduction.....	41
Structure.....	41
Objectives .....	41
Databricks file system.....	42
<i>Using mount points</i> .....	42
<i>Recipe 11: Using the DBFS file browser</i> .....	42
<i>Recipe 12: Using Databricks' web terminal</i> .....	45
<i>Recipe 13: Using Databricks Utilities' file system methods</i> .....	46
<i>The importance of DBFS</i> .....	48
Lakehouse design.....	48
<i>Source to Silver</i> .....	48
<i>Including raw</i> .....	50
<i>The document allowed operations crossing layers</i> .....	50
<i>Source to raw</i> .....	51
<i>Source to bronze</i> .....	52
<i>Raw to bronze</i> .....	52
<i>Bronze to silver</i> .....	53
<i>Silver to silver</i> .....	53
<i>Silver to gold and gold to gold</i> .....	54
<i>Recipes 14: Using the Lakehouse layer presentation</i> .....	54
Azure.....	55
ADLS Gen2.....	55
<i>Credential passthrough</i> .....	55
<i>Recipe 15: Creating a storage account for ADLS Gen2</i> .....	56
<i>Recipe 16: Creating a container and setting ACLs</i> .....	57
<i>Recipe 17: Using Passthrough authentication</i> .....	60
<i>Key vault and secret scope</i> .....	62
<i>Recipe 18: Link a key vault to a secret scope</i> .....	62
<i>Recipe 19: Displaying a redacted value</i> .....	64
Blob storage.....	64

<i>Recipe 20: Account keys</i> .....	65
<i>Recipe 21: Service principle</i> .....	66
<i>Recipe 22: Shared access signatures</i> .....	72
Conclusion.....	75
<b>4. Creating Delta Tables</b> .....	<b>77</b>
Introduction.....	77
Structure.....	77
Objectives .....	77
Delta Lake.....	78
<i>Managed and unmanaged tables</i> .....	78
<i>Deciding table type</i> .....	78
<i>Schema and database</i> .....	79
Creating managed Delta tables .....	81
<i>Ways to create</i> .....	81
<i>Recipe 23: Upload data using Databricks workspace</i> .....	81
SQL .....	87
<i>Recipe 24: Reading the SQL language reference</i> .....	87
<i>Recipe 25: Creating a table with SQL</i> .....	90
<i>Recipe 26: Creating a table with SQL using AS</i> .....	91
Spark API.....	92
<i>Recipe 27: Creating a table using Spark API and random data</i> .....	92
<i>Recipe 28: Examining table history</i> .....	94
Managed tables details .....	96
<i>Recipe 29: Managed Delta table details</i> .....	97
<i>Recipe 30: Using Data Explorer to see table details</i> .....	99
Creating unmanaged tables.....	100
<i>Recipe 31: Using Databricks CLI to create a secret scope</i> .....	100
<i>Recipe 32: Accessing S3 from Databricks on AWS</i> .....	103
<i>Recipe 33: Creating an external Delta table in SQL on AWS</i> .....	104
<i>Recipe 34: Creating an external table in PySpark on AWS</i> .....	107
<i>Recipe 35: Creating an external Delta table in SQL on Azure</i> .....	109
<i>Recipe 36: Creating an external table with Python on Azure</i> .....	111
<i>Recipe 37: Accessing GCP buckets from Databricks</i> .....	112



<i>Recipe 38: Creating an external Delta table in SQL on GCP</i> .....	114
<i>Recipe 39: Creating an external Delta table in Python on GCP</i> .....	116
Conclusion.....	118
<b>5. Data Profiling and Modeling in the Lakehouse</b> .....	<b>119</b>
Introduction .....	119
Structure .....	119
Objectives .....	119
Data profiling.....	120
<i>Recipe 40: Using Azure Data Factory to ingest raw</i> .....	120
<i>Recipe 41: Reorganize files</i> .....	129
<i>Recipe 42: Creating tables from a directory programmatically</i> .....	130
<i>Recipe 43: Data profiling using Databricks native functionality</i> .....	131
<i>Recipe 44: Listing row counts for all</i> .....	133
<i>Recipe 45: Using DBUtils summarize</i> .....	134
<i>Recipe 46: Using a DataFrames describe and summary methods</i> .....	136
<i>Recipe 47: Descriptive data analysis with Pandas profiling</i> .....	139
Data modeling .....	142
Common modeling approaches.....	142
Entity-relationship data modelling.....	143
Star schema .....	143
Snowflake schema.....	144
Standardized data models .....	145
Retrieval optimized models .....	145
Design approach .....	146
Conclusion .....	147
<b>6. Extracting from Source and Loading to Bronze</b> .....	<b>149</b>
Introduction .....	149
Structure .....	149
Objectives .....	150
To raw or not to raw .....	150
Using change data feed.....	150
Overview of change data feed .....	150
<i>Recipe 48: Creating a table with change data feed on</i> .....	151

<i>Recipe 49: Using Python to enable CDF</i> .....	151
<i>Recipe 50: Ensure CDF is enabled for all tables</i> .....	154
Loading files using self-managed watermarks.....	155
<i>Incremental ingestion example</i> .....	155
<i>Recipes 51: Using incremental load of files</i> .....	157
<i>Recipes 52: Convert Event Hub data to JSON</i> .....	167
<i>Recipes 53: Full load of files</i> .....	170
Loading files using Auto Loader .....	172
<i>Auto Loader overview</i> .....	172
<i>Recipe 54: Incremental ingestion of files Avro using Auto Loader in Python</i> .....	172
<i>Recipe 55: Incremental ingestion of CSV files using Auto Loader in Python</i> .....	174
Loading files using Delta Live Tables .....	177
<i>Delta Live Tables overview</i> .....	177
<i>Recipe 56: Using the DLT SQL API to ingest JSON</i> .....	178
<i>Recipe 57: Incremental ingestion using DLT using Python API</i> .....	187
<i>Recipe 58: Full ingestion using DLT using SQL API</i> .....	188
<i>Recipe 59: Full ingestion using DLT using Python API</i> .....	189
Loading streaming data .....	190
<i>Recipe 60: Parameterizing pipelines</i> .....	190
<i>Recipe 61: Stream processing with DLT Python API</i> .....	191
<i>Recipe 62: Using Spark structured streaming</i> .....	197
Conclusion .....	202
<b>7. Transforming to Create Silver</b> .....	<b>203</b>
Introduction .....	203
Structure .....	203
Objectives .....	204
Bronze to silver .....	204
<i>Incremental refinement</i> .....	204
<i>Recipe 63: Incremental refinement using Delta Live Tables</i> .....	204
<i>Recipe 64: Incremental refinement using PySpark</i> .....	206
<i>Full refinement</i> .....	212
<i>Recipe 65: Full update refinement using Delta Live Tables</i> .....	212
<i>Recipe 66: Full refinement using PySpark</i> .....	214

Data quality rules.....	216
Recipe 67: Using expectations in DLT with SQL.....	216
Recipe 68: Using expectations in DLT with PySpark.....	218
Silver to silver .....	219
Reshaping projection .....	220
Recipe 69: Projection reshaping using Python .....	220
Recipe 70: Projection reshaping using Delta Live Tables.....	221
Splitting tables .....	222
Recipe 71: Splitting table into multiple in PySpark .....	222
Recipe 72: Splitting table into multiple in Delta Live Tables .....	223
Enrichment .....	225
Recipe 73: Creating lookup data from telemetry .....	225
Recipe 74: Combining tables using DLT.....	227
Conclusion .....	228
<b>8. Transforming to Create Gold for Business Purposes .....</b>	<b>229</b>
Introduction .....	229
Structure .....	229
Objectives .....	230
Silver to gold.....	230
Aggregation .....	230
Recipe 75: Aggregation in Delta Live Tables .....	230
Dimensional tables using PySpark .....	232
Recipe 76: Creating a time dimension.....	232
Recipe 77: Creating a dimension from telemetry .....	233
Recipe 78: Creating a fact table from telemetry.....	235
Dimensional tables in Delta Live Tables .....	237
Recipe 79: Dimensional models with Delta Live Table .....	237
Using Common Data Models with Delta Live Tables.....	240
Microsoft Common Data Model .....	240
Gold to gold .....	240
Table optimization for consumption .....	240
Optimize .....	242
Recipe 80: Manually optimize a table .....	242

---

<i>Vacuum</i> .....	242
<i>Recipe 81: Vacuum a Delta table</i> .....	243
Conclusion .....	244
<b>9. Machine Learning and Data Science .....</b>	<b>245</b>
Introduction .....	245
Structure .....	245
Objectives .....	246
Machine Learning in Databricks.....	246
Using AutoML .....	246
<i>Recipe 82: Creating an ML cluster</i> .....	247
<i>Recipe 83: Importing data with the Databricks web page</i> .....	248
<i>Recipe 84: Creating and running an AutoML experiment</i> .....	249
Setting up and using MLflow.....	253
<i>Recipe 85: Setting up an MLflow experiment</i> .....	253
<i>Recipe 86: Using MLflow for non-ML workflows</i> .....	255
Deploying models to production.....	258
<i>Recipe 87: Registering a model</i> .....	258
<i>Recipe 88: Using a model for inference</i> .....	260
Using Databricks feature store .....	264
<i>Recipe 89: Importing an HTML notebook</i> .....	264
<i>Recipe 90: Basic interaction with Databricks Feature Store</i> .....	265
Conclusion .....	268
<b>10. SQL Analysis.....</b>	<b>269</b>
Introduction .....	269
Structure .....	269
Objectives .....	270
Databricks SQL.....	270
Creating and managing a SQL Warehouse.....	270
<i>Recipe 91: Creating a SQL Warehouse</i> .....	271
<i>Recipe 92: Connect to a SQL Warehouse from a Python Jupyter Notebook</i> .....	274
Using the SQL Editor.....	275
Writing queries .....	277
<i>Common interview queries</i> .....	278

<i>Recipe 93: Show the contents of a table</i> .....	278
<i>Recipe 94: Select with filtered ordered limited result</i> .....	279
<i>Recipe 95: Aggregation of records</i> .....	280
<i>Recipe 96: Using grouping to find duplicate records</i> .....	281
<i>Recipe 97: Generating synthetic data</i> .....	282
<i>Recipe 98: Calculate rollups</i> .....	284
<i>Recipe 99: Types of joins</i> .....	285
<i>Inner</i> .....	285
<i>Left and right outer joins</i> .....	286
<i>Full outer join</i> .....	287
<i>Cross join</i> .....	287
<i>Creating dashboards</i> .....	288
<i>Recipe 100: Creating a quick dashboard</i> .....	288
<i>Recipe 101: Schedule dashboard refresh</i> .....	291
Setting alerts.....	293
<i>Recipe 102: Create a query for an alert</i> .....	293
<i>Recipe 103: Create an alert</i> .....	293
Cost and performance considerations .....	298
Conclusion .....	300
<b>11. Graph Analysis</b> .....	<b>301</b>
Introduction .....	301
Structure .....	301
Objectives .....	302
What is a graph.....	302
When to use graph operations .....	303
GraphX.....	303
GraphFrames .....	304
<i>Recipe 104: Creating a GraphFrame</i> .....	304
<i>Recipe 105: Using example graphs</i> .....	306
Graph operations and algorithms .....	308
<i>Recipe 106: Breadth-first search</i> .....	308
<i>Recipe 107: PageRank</i> .....	309
<i>Recipe 108: Shortest path</i> .....	309

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<i>Recipe 109: Connected components</i> .....	310
<i>Recipe 110: Strongly connected components</i> .....	311
<i>Recipe 111: Label Propagation Algorithm</i> .....	312
<i>Recipe 112: Motif finding</i> .....	314
Neo4J and Databricks .....	315
<i>Recipe 113: Using AuraDB</i> .....	315
<i>Recipe 114: Reading Neo4J's AuraDB from Databricks</i> .....	318
Conclusion .....	321
<b>12. Visualizations</b> .....	<b>323</b>
Introduction .....	323
Structure .....	323
Objectives .....	323
Visualization best practices .....	324
<i>Visually appealing</i> .....	324
<i>Keep it simple</i> .....	324
<i>Explain unfamiliar graph types</i> .....	324
<i>Follow conventions</i> .....	324
<i>Tell a story</i> .....	325
Databricks dashboards .....	325
<i>Recipe 115: Importing sample dashboards</i> .....	325
<i>Recipe 116: Data preparation for a new dashboard</i> .....	329
<i>Recipe 117: Creating a dashboard</i> .....	332
Visualizations in Databricks notebooks .....	341
<i>Recipe 118: Using visualizations in notebooks</i> .....	341
Power BI .....	344
<i>Recipe 119: Connecting Power BI to Databricks</i> .....	344
Conclusion .....	348
<b>13. Governance</b> .....	<b>349</b>
Introduction .....	349
Structure .....	349
Objectives .....	349
Role of data governance .....	350
Using Unity Catalog .....	350

<i>Recipe 120: Configuring Unity Catalog in Azure</i> .....	350
<i>Creating storage</i> .....	350
<i>Create a managed identity</i> .....	350
<i>Create Access Connector for Azure Databricks</i> .....	351
<i>Grant managed identity access</i> .....	355
<i>Creating a metastore</i> .....	356
<i>Unity Catalog object model</i> .....	360
<i>Recipe 121: Creating a new catalog</i> .....	361
<i>Recipe 122: Uploading data</i> .....	362
<i>Recipe 123: Creating a table</i> .....	363
Installing and using Purview .....	364
<i>Recipe 124: Installing Purview</i> .....	364
<i>Recipe 125: Connecting Purview to Databricks</i> .....	365
<i>Recipe 126: Scanning a Databricks workspace</i> .....	367
<i>Recipe 127: Browsing the Data Catalog</i> .....	371
Conclusion .....	372
<b>14. Operations</b> .....	<b>373</b>
Introduction .....	373
Structure .....	373
Objectives .....	373
Source code management and orchestration .....	374
<i>Recipe 128: Use GitHub with Databricks</i> .....	374
<i>Recipe 129: Create workflows to orchestrate processing</i> .....	379
<i>Recipe 130: Saving a Job JSON</i> .....	385
<i>Recipe 131: Use Airflow to coordinate processing</i> .....	387
Scheduled and ongoing maintenance .....	389
<i>Recipe 132: Repairing damaged tables</i> .....	389
<i>Recipe 133: Vacuum unneeded data</i> .....	393
<i>Recipe 134: Optimize Delta tables</i> .....	395
Cost management .....	395
<i>Recipe 135: Use cluster policies</i> .....	395
<i>Recipe 136: Using tags to monitor costs</i> .....	397
Conclusion .....	398

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<b>15. Tips, Tricks, Troubleshooting, and Best Practices</b> .....	<b>399</b>
Introduction .....	399
Structure .....	399
Objectives .....	400
Ingesting relational data with Databricks .....	400
<i>Recipe 137: Loading data from MySQL</i> .....	400
<i>Recipe 138: Extending a Python class and reading using Databricks runtime format</i> .....	402
<i>Recipe 139: Caching DataFrames</i> .....	403
<i>Recipe 140: Loading data from MySQL using workers</i> .....	405
Performance optimization .....	407
<i>Using Databricks event log</i> .....	407
<i>Exploring the Spark UI jobs tab</i> .....	408
<i>Using the Spark UI SQL/DataFrame tab</i> .....	411
<i>Recipe 141: Using pools to improve performance</i> .....	413
Programmatic deployment and interaction .....	415
<i>Recipe 142: Creating a workspace with ARM Template</i> .....	415
<i>Recipe 143: Using the Databricks API</i> .....	419
Reading a Kafka stream .....	422
<i>Recipe 144: Creating a Kafka cluster</i> .....	422
<i>Recipe 145: Using confluent cloud</i> .....	425
Notebook orchestration .....	429
<i>Recipe 146: Running a notebook with parameters</i> .....	429
<i>Recipe 147: Conditional execution of notebooks</i> .....	431
Best practices.....	432
<i>Organize data assets by source until silver</i> .....	432
<i>Use automation as much as possible</i> .....	433
<i>Use version control</i> .....	433
<i>Keep each step of the process simple</i> .....	433
<i>Do not be afraid to change</i> .....	434
Conclusion .....	434
<b>Index</b> .....	<b>435-442</b>



# CHAPTER 1

# Introduction to Databricks Lakehouse

## Introduction

Welcome to our journey of learning and mastering the Databricks Lakehouse Platform. This is a hands-on book. While we will cover each topic's theoretical and technical foundations, you will have code to help you learn how to build a Lakehouse and succeed using Databricks.

## Structure

In this chapter, we will cover the following topics:

- Background
- Brief history of Big Data, Spark, and Databricks
- Databricks community edition
- Data Lakehouse value proposition
- Lakehouse architecture
- Design considerations
- Lakehouse compared to other data technologies

## Objectives

This chapter introduces nomenclature commonly used when discussing the Databricks Lakehouse Platform. By the end of the chapter, you should be able to describe a typical Lakehouse configuration and understand the architectural components and the value proposition of the lakehouse architecture.

## Background

It is often important to understand a phenomenon's history that influenced its creation, and Data Lakehouse is no exception. We start with a brief history of Big Data, Spark, and Databricks. We briefly discuss the Databricks community edition and perform our first analysis in Databricks. We close this section by discussing the value proposition that drives the adoption of Data lakehouse, particularly Databricks Lakehouse.

## Brief history of Big Data, Spark, and Databricks

When looking at how things came to be, we often discuss supporting and challenging forces. In the case of Big Data, several forces were driving its adoption. One key supporting force was the shift of the Internet from companies and government entities sharing information with their customers to users of platforms creating content in social media. Companies also learned that online sales had many advantages over traditional outlets, including lower operating costs. This shift generated vast amounts of data that previously was minimal. Online retailers learned that examining those log files could give insights into their customers that previously was not possible. The desire to process this information, which was too large to process with traditional file-processing approaches, led to the creation of a new set of technologies. Big Data was used to label these distributed, software-based fault-tolerant algorithms and technologies.

One of the early success stories of Big Data was Hadoop. Hadoop is a collection of open-source projects related to processing large, fast, or variant data. An early processing approach in Hadoop was called MapReduce. MapReduce was a framework that simplified the process of creating distributed solutions. Before Big Data frameworks like MapReduce, software developers coordinated activities between various workers attempting to

work together to solve a problem. Often, one or more of those workers would become unavailable. The software developer's job was to determine how to address this and many other challenges. With MapReduce, a developer was tasked with writing a few functions called by a framework to simplify the process. While MapReduce was a significant advancement, it was limited by its original design and purpose. MapReduce was focused on processing large or numerous files. Due to this design goal, it failed to support iteration and relied heavily on disk drives.

Spark was developed to address many of these challenges. Spark is a computational solution that relies on other technologies for storage. It also favors processing data in memory, resulting in significant performance improvements over MapReduce. Spark also enabled iteration during processing. These advancements lead to its rapid adoption and increasing popularity. Many of the creators of Spark formed Databricks in 2013. Databricks is a cloud company supporting the major cloud vendors. In 2017 Azure Databricks was announced. This partnership was notable because of the high integration between Azure and Databricks.

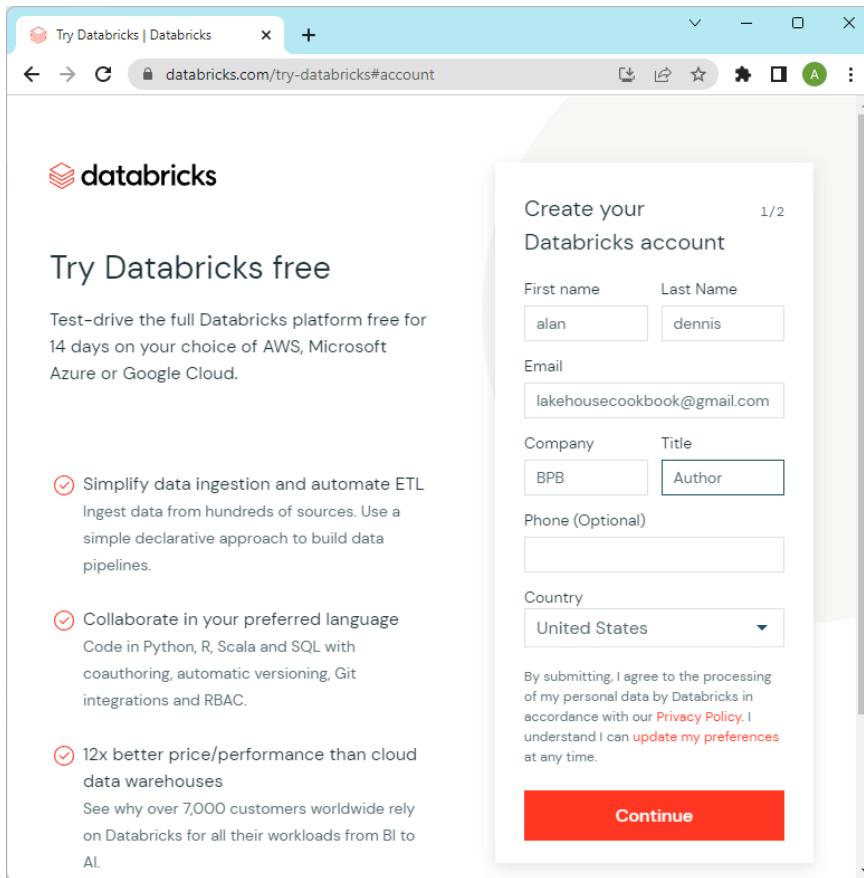
A data lakehouse is an architecture that combines the best elements of data lakes to address data warehousing needs. It is an open standards-based set of technologies. A key distinction of data lakehouse from data lakes is that it uses a schema and **Atomic, Consistent, Isolated, and Durable (ACID)** transactions. Lakehouses allow updates to a record, while data lakes treat data as immutable. In Databricks, Spark is the computational engine supporting all lakehouse processing, and Delta Lake is the storage format used to enable ACID transactions and schemas. Delta Lake is based on the Parquet format, with transaction logs in **JavaScript Object Notation (JSON)** to journal interactions with data. A Delta Lake exists on top of data lakes and cloud storage containers.

## Databricks community edition

Databricks understands that learning technology is essential for its adoption. Databricks offers a community edition of its platform to enable learning and smaller workloads. The community edition offers limited functionality compared to the enterprise-class versions available on AWS, Azure, and **Google Cloud Platform (GCP)**. The community edition has several restrictions, including little computational power and lacks automation capabilities via an API. To learn more about the Databricks community edition, go to <https://docs.databricks.com/getting-started/community-edition.html>.

## Recipe 1: Signing up for the Databricks community edition

To sign up for the Databricks community edition, go to <https://www.databricks.com/try-databricks> and fill out the form, as shown in *Figure 1.1*. You will be asked for your name, email, company, and job title:



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL `databricks.com/try-databricks#account`. The page features the Databricks logo and the heading "Try Databricks free". Below this, there is a promotional text: "Test-drive the full Databricks platform free for 14 days on your choice of AWS, Microsoft Azure or Google Cloud." Three bullet points highlight key features: "Simplify data ingestion and automate ETL", "Collaborate in your preferred language", and "12x better price/performance than cloud data warehouses". On the right side, a "Create your Databricks account" form is displayed, which is 1/2 of a two-step process. The form includes fields for "First name" (alan), "Last Name" (dennis), "Email" (lakehousecookbook@gmail.com), "Company" (BPB), and "Title" (Author). There are also optional fields for "Phone" and "Country" (United States). A red "Continue" button is at the bottom of the form. A privacy notice at the bottom of the form states: "By submitting, I agree to the processing of my personal data by Databricks in accordance with our Privacy Policy. I understand I can update my preferences at any time."

*Figure 1.1: Sign-up for Databricks Community Edition*

After clicking **Continue**, you are presented with a page asking you to choose your cloud provider, as shown in *Figure 1.2*. Under the section that refers to not having a cloud account, there is a link titled **Get Started** with Community Edition. It is relatively small and easy to miss, but it is how to sign up for the free community edition.

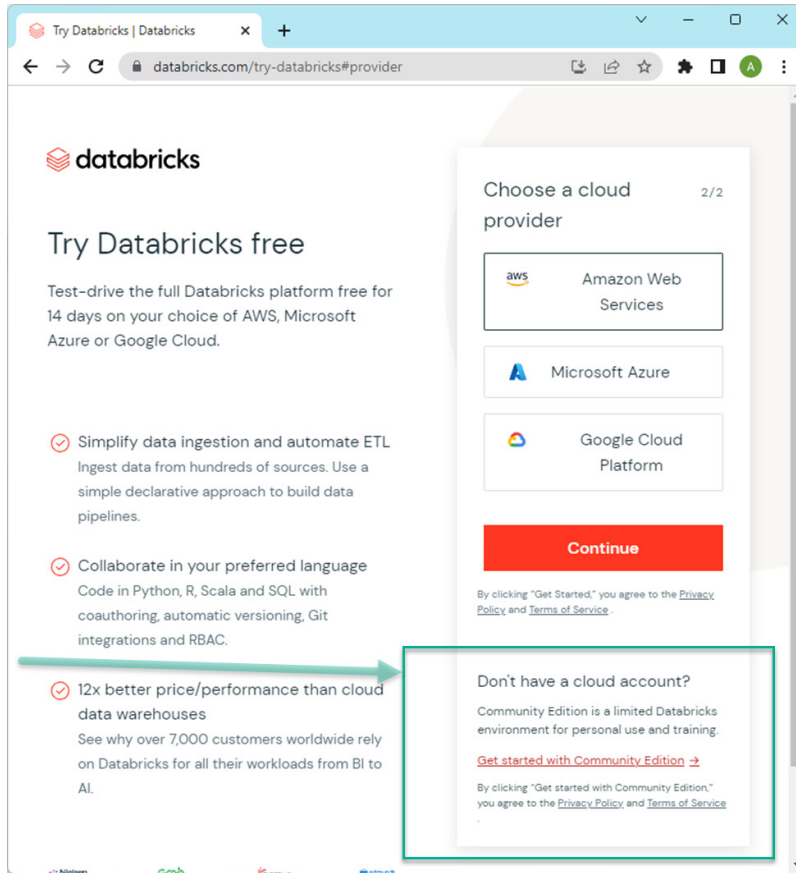


Figure 1.2: Select getting started with Databricks Community Edition

After clicking the link, you will likely be asked to prove you are a human by solving a simple puzzle. After solving the puzzle, you will be redirected to a page asking you to confirm your email address. Check your email and click the link in the body to confirm receipt of the email message. You are then asked to provide a password for logging into the tool. After supplying a password, you will be redirected to the Databricks community edition home page.

## Recipe 2: Creating a notebook in the Databricks Community edition

The areas of the community edition Databricks workspace are similar to that of the enterprise-class cloud-hosted versions, as shown in Figure 1.3. The layout is organized