

An entity is something that can be identified in the users work environment, something that the users want to track.

Example entities are EMPLOYEE Mary Doe,
CUSTOMER12345,
SALES-ORDER 1000,
SALESPERSON John Smith.

Entities of a given type are grouped into entity classes. Thus, the EMPLOYEE entity class is the collection of all EMPLOYEE entities.

It is important to understand the differences between an entity class and an entity instance. An entity class is a collection of entities and is described by the structure or format of the entities in that class.

An instance of an entity class is the representation of a particular entity ; it is described by the values of attributes of the entity.

There are usually many instances of an entity in an entity class.

For example within the class CUSTOMER, there are many instances-one for each customer represented in the database. An entity class and two of its instances are shown at [entities](#).

The entity -relationship model defines a special type of entity called a [weak entity](#). Such entities are those which cannot exist in the database unless another type of entity also exists in the database. An entity that is not weak is called a strong entity.