

SQL Cohort Analysis PDF Page

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PART 1: Page plan

Item	Decision
Final URL	https://uncodemy.com/sql-cohort-analysis-pdf
Intent (anti-cannibalisation)	COHORT AND RETENTION ANALYSIS in SQL. General window-function recipes are on the analytics functions page.
Why not thin	Explainer-style sections, FAQs and cross-links make the page useful even without a download
Schema	WebSite, Organization, Breadcrumb, CollectionPage, FAQPage (only FAQs visible on the page). PDF <code>ItemList</code> provided commented, to enable after titles are final
Share image	https://uncodemy.com/image/logo-og.jpg for now; custom 1200x630 card recommended

PART 2: Page content (copy-paste ready)

SEO Title (34 chars):

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Meta Description (139 chars):

Download the SQL cohort analysis guide PDF from Uncodemy: define cohorts, build retention tables and read the results, with tested queries.

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Quick Answer

This page offers Uncodemy's SQL cohort analysis guide as a PDF download. A cohort is a group of customers who share a starting point, such as the month of their first order. Cohort analysis tracks how each group behaves over time, which shows retention more honestly than a single overall average. The guide builds the full SQL step by step.

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Why cohorts

An overall retention or repeat-purchase figure can hide what is really happening. If a business is growing quickly, most customers are new and the overall average looks healthy even if each new group is leaving faster than the last. Cohort analysis separates customers by when they started and follows each group on its own timeline, so you can ask whether customers acquired in March behave differently from those acquired in June, and whether a change such as a new onboarding flow actually improved retention. It is a standard tool in subscription, e-commerce and app analytics. The examples use these tables: customers(customer_id, name, city, signup_date), orders(order_id, customer_id, order_date, status, order_total), order_items(order_id, product_id, quantity, unit_price) and products(product_id, product_name, category). Dates are text in YYYY-MM-DD form, so the examples run in SQLite and need small changes in other databases.

Key terms

Term	Meaning
Cohort	A group of customers who started in the same period, such as the month of first order
Cohort month	The month in which the customer first purchased
Period number	Months since the cohort month (0 for the first month, 1 for the next, and so on)
Retention rate	Share of the cohort that was active in a given period
Active customer	A customer with at least one qualifying order in the period

The five steps of a cohort query

1. Find each customer's first order month: this is the cohort.
2. Find the months in which each customer was active.
3. Calculate the period number as the gap in months between activity and the cohort month.
4. Count distinct active customers by cohort and period.
5. Divide by the cohort size to get the retention rate.

Step 1 and 2: cohorts and activity

Each customer's first order month and every month in which they ordered.

```
WITH first_order AS (  
  SELECT customer_id,  
         MIN(strftime('%Y-%m', order_date)) AS cohort_month  
  FROM orders  
  WHERE status <> 'cancelled'  
  GROUP BY customer_id  
)  
,  
activity AS (  
  SELECT DISTINCT customer_id,  
                  strftime('%Y-%m', order_date) AS active_month  
  FROM orders  
  WHERE status <> 'cancelled'  
)  
SELECT f.cohort_month, a.active_month, COUNT(*) AS customers  
FROM first_order f  
JOIN activity a ON a.customer_id = f.customer_id  
GROUP BY f.cohort_month, a.active_month  
ORDER BY f.cohort_month, a.active_month;
```

The full retention table

Adds the period number and the retention rate. The month difference is computed from the year and month parts, which works in SQLite; other databases have date-difference functions.

```
WITH first_order AS (  
  SELECT customer_id, MIN(strftime('%Y-%m', order_date)) AS cohort_month  
  FROM orders WHERE status <> 'cancelled'  
  GROUP BY customer_id  
)  
,  
activity AS (  
  SELECT DISTINCT customer_id, strftime('%Y-%m', order_date) AS active_month  
  FROM orders WHERE status <> 'cancelled'  
)  
,  
joined AS (  
  SELECT f.cohort_month, a.customer_id,  
         (CAST(SUBSTR(a.active_month, 1, 4) AS INTEGER) * 12 + CAST(SUBSTR(a.active_month, 6, 2) AS INTEGER))  
         - (CAST(SUBSTR(f.cohort_month, 1, 4) AS INTEGER) * 12 + CAST(SUBSTR(f.cohort_month, 6, 2) AS INTEGER)) AS period  
  FROM first_order f  
  JOIN activity a ON a.customer_id = f.customer_id  
)  
,  
cohort_size AS (  
  SELECT cohort_month, COUNT(*) AS size FROM first_order GROUP BY cohort_month  
)  
SELECT j.cohort_month, j.period,  
       COUNT(DISTINCT j.customer_id) AS active_customers,  
       ROUND(COUNT(DISTINCT j.customer_id) * 100.0 / s.size, 1) AS retention_pct  
FROM joined j  
JOIN cohort_size s ON s.cohort_month = j.cohort_month  
GROUP BY j.cohort_month, j.period, s.size  
ORDER BY j.cohort_month, j.period;
```

How to read the result

Arrange the output as a triangle: cohorts down the side, periods across the top and retention percentages in the cells. Period zero is always one hundred percent because every customer in the cohort ordered in their first month. Read across a row to see how one cohort fades; read down a column to compare cohorts at the same age. A column that improves for later cohorts suggests that something you changed helped. A sudden drop in one calendar month across all cohorts points to an external event, such as a stock-out or an outage, rather than to customer behaviour.

Interpreting patterns

Pattern in the table	Possible meaning	Next question
Steep fall after period 1	Many one-time buyers	What happens in the first purchase experience?
Flat tail after period 3	A loyal core remains	Who are they and how do we find more?
Newer cohorts retain better	Improvement in product or onboarding	Which change coincided with it?
Newer cohorts retain worse	Lower-quality acquisition or product issue	Which channel or offer changed?
Same dip in one calendar month	External event	Check operations and marketing records

Cohort variations

- Weekly cohorts for fast-moving apps; yearly cohorts for slow businesses.
- Cohorts by acquisition channel to compare quality of customers.
- Revenue retention: sum spending by period rather than counting customers.
- Rolling retention: active in period n or later.

Common cohort mistakes

- **Counting orders instead of distinct customers.**
- **Including incomplete current months**, which makes the latest period look weak.
- **Tiny cohorts** that produce noisy percentages.
- **Mixing definitions of active** between reports.
- **Ignoring cancelled or refunded orders** when the business rules say to exclude them.

Practice

Build the table on any orders dataset. Then change the definition of active, for example to require at least two orders in the month, and see how retention changes. Write a short summary with the key pattern and one recommended action. Being able to explain a retention triangle clearly is a strong interview skill.

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Frequently Asked Questions

What is cohort analysis?

Cohort analysis groups customers by a shared starting point, such as the month of their first purchase, and tracks each group's behaviour over time.

How do you calculate retention in SQL?

Find each customer's cohort month, find their active months, compute the period number, count distinct active customers per cohort and period and divide by the cohort size.

Why is cohort retention better than overall retention?

Overall figures mix customers of different ages and can hide whether newer groups behave better or worse.

What does period 0 mean in a cohort table?

Period 0 is the cohort's first month. It is always 100 percent because each customer made a purchase then.

What are common cohort analysis mistakes?

Counting orders instead of customers, including incomplete months, using tiny cohorts and inconsistent definitions of an active customer.

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