

## COMBINING ELEMENTS

When you're designing a data entry form, never ask the user to key a string that you can generate automatically. For example, suppose you want to generate an invoice number based on existing pieces of information, such as the customer name, customer number, and the current date. Instead of making your data entry operator key that custom invoice number from scratch, you can generate it by concatenating those elements.

To do so, open your form in Design View, add a new text box, and enter the appropriate expression as the data source for that text box.

To combine elements correctly, you need to be aware of how Access concatenates different data types. Rule 1: The first character of your expression must be an equal sign (=). Rule 2: Use the ampersand (&) and not the plus sign (+) to combine discrete elements into a single string.

For example, if `strCompany` is a character field that contains the name Acme Floors, `intCode` is an integer that contains the company-code number 104, and `dDate` is a date/time field that contains the entry 10/1/02, the expression `=[strCompany]&[intCode]&[dDate]` returns the string Acme Floors10410102.

You can use string functions such as `Left` and `Right` to extract only certain characters from one string for inclusion in your new string. In this example, the expression `=Left([strCompany],3)&[intCode]&[dDate]` will return the string Acm10410102.

NOTE: The way your date component appears in the concatenated string depends on the date format assigned to the field. To view or change the date field's format, open the table in Design View and select the date field. Click the General tab and enter a new format.